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HISTORY OF ANCIENT  
IRELAND : CREATING OF THE  
GOVERNMENT, MILITARY SYSTEM,  
AND LAW ; RELIGION, LEARNING,  
AND ART; TRADES, INDUSTRIES, AND  
COMMERCE; MANNERS, CUSTOMS,  
AND DOMESTIC LIFE, OF THE ANCIENT  
IRISH PEOPLE

Volume

JOYCE, P. W. (PATRICK WESTON), 1827-1914







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FIG. 1.

Frontispiece to the Epistle of St. Jerome in the Book of Durrow  
 From Miss Stokes's *Early Christian Art in Ireland*, d.



# A SOCIAL HISTORY OF ANCIENT IRELAND

TREATING OF

*The Government, Military System, and Law ;  
Religion, Learning, and Art ; Trades, Industries, and Commerce ;  
Manners, Customs, and Domestic Life,  
of the Ancient Irish People*

BY

P. W. JOYCE,

LL.D., TRIN. COLL., DUB. ; M.R.I.A.

*One of the Commissioners for the Publication of the Ancient Laws of Ireland*

VOL. I

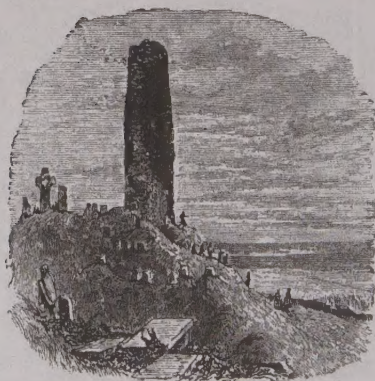
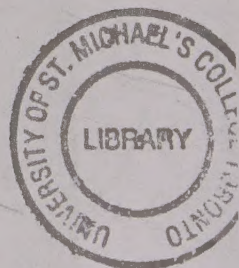


FIG 2.—Great Tower, Clonmacnoise. (From Petrie's Round Towers.)



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*The Place, Time, Author, and Cause of Writing, of this book, are :—Its place is Lyre-na-Grena, Leinster-road, Rathmines, Dublin ; its time is the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and three ; the author is Patrick Weston Joyce, Doctor of Laws ; and the cause of writing the same book is to give glory to God, honour to Ireland, and knowledge to those who desire to learn all about the Old Irish People.*





FIG. 3.—Sculpture over a doorway, Cormac's Chapel, Cashel; Centaur shooting at a lion.  
(From Petrie's Round Towers).

## PREFACE

AN important function of History is to depict social and domestic life. If we wish to obtain a clear view of the general state of any particular country in past times, we shall need to have a good knowledge of the people, high and low, rich and poor; their standards of civilisation, religion, and learning; their virtues and failings; their industries, occupations, and amusements; their manners and customs; and the sort of life they led day by day in their homes.

The social condition of most of those ancient nations that have made any figure in the world has been investigated and set forth in books; and perhaps it will be acknowledged that Ireland deserves to be similarly commemorated. For, besides the general importance of all such studies in elucidating the history of the human race, the ancient Irish were a highly intellectual and interesting people; and the world owes them something, as I hope to be able to show. In this book an attempt is made to picture society, in all its phases, as it existed in Ireland before the



Anglo-Norman Invasion ; and to accomplish this work—to bring together in one Essay all that is known on the subject—every authentic source of information within my reach has been turned to account. I have collected the scattered Sibylline leaves with much loving labour, and sorted and pieced them together slowly and patiently, so as to form a connected and intelligible statement ; but in my case there were a hundred times more inscribed leaves to deal with than ever any votary picked up in the Sibyl's cave. Or perhaps some of my readers, putting aside this metaphor, may rather see in the book the likeness of some spacious edifice, with symmetrical wings and numerous bright apartments, all differently furnished and ornamented. The visitor who wishes to enter here and explore the interior will find the way plainly pointed out at the opening of every corridor, and each apartment labelled to indicate, in a general way, what is to be seen inside.

The society depicted here—as the reader will soon discover for himself—was of slow and methodical growth and development ; duly subordinated from the highest grades of people to the lowest ; with clearly defined ranks, professions, trades, and industries ; and in general with those various pursuits and institutions found in every well-ordered community : a society compacted and held together by an all-embracing system of laws and customs, long established and universally recognised.

This subject has been to some extent treated of

by other writers, notably by Ware, O'Curry, and Sullivan ; and I have taken full advantage of their learned labours. But they deal with portions only, and of course give only partial views : my Essay aims at opening up the entire field. I am fully sensible of the shortcomings of this first attempt to bring the whole social life of the ancient Irish people under one broad view ; for besides the liability to error and imperfection incident to every new undertaking, the sources of information on the state of ancient Ireland are not yet fully available. But it is better to make the attempt now, even under some disadvantages, than to postpone it indefinitely.

This book does not deal with pre-historic times, except by occasional reference, or to illustrate the historic period. My survey generally goes back only so far as there is light from living record—history or tradition. I am content to stand near the outer margin of the fog, and observe and delineate the people as they emerge from darkness and twilight. At first indeed there is often only a faint glimmer, and the figures and their surroundings are shadowy and indistinct : but subsequent observation, made in broad historical daylight, generally enables us to clear up the uncertainty or correct the error of the first dim view.

Where such a vast variety of subjects had to be treated of within the compass of two medium-sized volumes, it would be manifestly impossible to pursue inquiries exhaustively, or to go quite to

the bottom of things. But so far as the Essay is intended to reach, I have done my very best to secure accuracy—accuracy of statement, of inference, of quotation, and of reference ; and whoever discovers an error may be assured that it is not the result of haste or carelessness.\*

I have been very particular to give exact references for all statements of any importance. Quotations from other languages are always given in English : but wherever it seemed necessary or desirable the originals also are quoted. Where there are two or more editions or versions of works consulted, references are given as far as possible to those that are most easily accessible to the general reader. I have utilised without stint the labours of others, both of the past and of the present, but never, I think, without acknowledgment.

Attention has been given to the forms and meanings of words and names so far as it tended to elucidate the general subject : but it must be remembered that the main intention of this book is to deal, not with words, but with things. When an Irish word or name varies in spelling, the several forms are generally given, either in the text or in the Index. Animals, plants, minerals, and external nature in general, are treated of only so far as they come directly into touch with the Social Life of the people : and they are brought in under the several chapters wherever they fit best.

\* Those who wish to study particular portions of the subject further will be aided by the references all through the book, and by the List of Authorities at the end.

The numerous illustrations relate to the several current parts of the text ; and I hope they will be found an instructive and pleasing feature of the book.

I have taken occasion all along to compare Irish Social Life with that of other ancient nations, especially pointing out correspondences that are the natural consequence of common Aryan origin : but want of space precluded much indulgence in this very desirable direction.

The writer who endeavours to set forth his subject—whatever it may be—in “ words of truth and soberness,” is sure to encounter the disapproval or hostility of those who hold extreme opinions on either side. In regard to my subject, we have, on the one hand, those English and Anglo-Irish people—and they are not few—who think, merely from ignorance, that Ireland was a barbarous and half-savage country before the English came among the people and civilised them ; and, on the other hand, there are those of my countrymen who have an exaggerated idea of the greatness and splendour of the ancient Irish nation.\* I have not been in the least influenced by writers belonging to either class. Following trustworthy authorities, I have tried to present here a true picture of ancient Irish life, neither over-praising nor depreciating. I have not magnified what was worthy of commendation, nor suppressed, nor unwarrantably toned down, features that told

\* See on this Stokes's *Life of Petrie*, p. 211.



unfavourably for the people : for though I love the honour of Ireland well, I love truth better.

The Irish race, after a long-protracted struggle, went down before a stronger people ; and in addition to this, from causes which it would be out of place to discuss here, they suffered almost a total eclipse at home during a period nearly coincident with the eighteenth century. Chiefly for these reasons the old Irish people have never, in modern times, received the full measure of credit due to them for their early and striking advance in the arts of civilised life, for their very comprehensive system of laws, and for their noble and successful efforts, both at home and abroad, in the cause of religion and learning. Of late indeed we can perceive, among Continental and British writers, something like a spontaneous movement showing a tendency to do them justice ; but the essays in this direction, though just, and often even generous, as far as they go, are fragmentary, scattered, and fitful. Those who are interested in this aspect of the subject will perhaps be pleased to have the whole case presented to them in one Essay.

I now submit to the judgment of the public this book, the outcome of eight years' congenial and pleasant work, hoping that it will prove acceptable, not only to those who desire information on the Institutions and Social Life of the ancient Irish, and of the Celtic people in general, but also to that wider circle who are interested in the early History of Mankind.

I have now to discharge the pleasant duty of recording my thanks for help towards illustrating this book.

The Councils of the Royal Irish Academy, and of the Royal Society of Antiquaries, Ireland, gave me the use of the blocks of great numbers of the illustrations in their respective publications, and where the blocks were not available, permitted me to copy any of their illustrations I wanted. That the book is so well illustrated is mainly owing to the liberality of these two distinguished Societies. There is no need to enter into detail here, as under every illustration in the book is mentioned the source from which it is derived : but I wish to direct attention to the number of valuable and accurate figures I have borrowed from Wilde's "Catalogue of Irish Antiquities," belonging to the Royal Irish Academy.

Messrs. Hodges, Figgis & Co., of Dublin, placed at my disposal the blocks of as many of Petrie's and Wakeman's beautiful drawings as I chose to ask for.

Colonel Wood-Martin lent me the blocks of many of the illustrations in his "Pagan Ireland" and "Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland."

From the Board of Education, South Kensington, I have received permission to use electrotypes from the original blocks of nearly a dozen of the admirable illustrations in Miss Stokes's "Early Christian Art in Ireland."

The Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office, London, allowed me to reproduce some of the illustrations in Sir John T. Gilbert's "Facsimiles of Irish National Manuscripts."

I am indebted to the late Mr. Bernard Quaritch of London for leave to reproduce the beautiful illuminated page of the Book of Mac Durnan, from Westwood's "Facsimiles of Anglo-Saxon and Irish Manuscripts."

Messrs. George Bell & Sons lent me the blocks of some of the illustrations in Miss Stokes's "Three Months in the Forests of France," and "Six months in the Apennines."

I had the permission of the Rev. Dr. Abbott, S.F.T.C.D., to copy some of the figures in his "Reproductions of Portions of the Book of Kells."

Lord Walter FitzGerald gave me leave to copy some of the

illustrations in the "Journal of the County Kildare Archæological Society."

The Editor of the "Revue Celtique" has given me permission to reproduce two of the figures in that periodical.

Besides the above, a number of illustrations have been taken from books having no copyright, and others have been purchased from the proprietors of copyright works: all of which are acknowledged in the proper places. And there are a good many original sketches appearing here now for the first time.

Dr. Petrie and Miss Margaret Stokes have been the chief illustrators of the Scenery and Antiquities of Ireland; and even a casual glance will show to what an extent I have been enabled to enrich this book with their beautiful and accurate drawings.

P. W. J.

DUBLIN, *October*, 1903.

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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

IN preparing this Edition I have had the advantage of a number of valuable remarks from Dr. Kuno Meyer, now our greatest and most accomplished Irish scholar. He read the book as soon as it came out, and as he went along took notes, which he sent to me unasked, and which I now thankfully acknowledge.

On my own part I have carefully re-read and re-considered every sentence in the book.

As the result of all, I have made some changes and corrections.

P. W. J.

Dublin, 1913.



FIG. 4.—Ornament composed from the Book of Kells.

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# PART I

GOVERNMENT, MILITARY SYSTEM, AND LAW





FIG. 6.—Ornament composed from the Book of Kells.

## CHAPTER I

### LAYING THE FOUNDATION

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#### SECTION I. *Native Development.*



THE Institutions, Arts, and Customs of Ancient Ireland, with few exceptions, grew up from within, almost wholly unaffected by external influence. The exceptions will be noticed in the proper places in this book. The Romans never set foot in Ireland ; though their influence was felt to some slight extent, either by direct communication or indirectly through the Britons. The first foreigners to appear as invaders were the **Danes**, who began their raids about the beginning of the ninth century. Though they harassed the country for about two centuries, and established themselves in many parts of it, especially on the coasts, they never brought it under subjection : and they effected no changes of any consequence in the customs or modes of life of the people. Next came the **Anglo-Normans** near the end of the twelfth century. But though this was a much more serious invasion than that of the Danes, and though these newcomers continued to make settlements in various parts of the country, the Irish people still adhered everywhere to their native customs. Indeed it is well known

that, except in a small district round Dublin, the settlers generally intermarried and became incorporated with the natives, adopting their language, laws, dress, and usages, so as to be quite undistinguishable from them, and becoming "more Irish than the Irish themselves." Accordingly, for several centuries the Anglo-Norman colonisation had no more effect in altering the general state of society than the Danish invasions : and matters went on very much as of old, till the time of the Tudors, when English influence at last made itself felt. Then the old system of tribal land tenure began to be changed for the English custom : and with the abolition of the Brehon Law and the substitution of English Law, in the beginning of the seventeenth century, it may be said that the old order of things in Ireland was broken up. But even after this most of the ancient native customs remained, and indeed many remain to this day.

In the long lapse of ages there were of course changes and developments from time to time : many new modes, fashions, and usages gradually grew up, while others fell into disuse : but the main institutions and customs of the country retained their hold with astonishing tenacity : so that in some aspects of society, a description of the state of things as they existed in, suppose, the fifteenth century, would apply equally well to that in the sixth or seventh. Many illustrations of this might be given ; but one will be sufficient here. It was customary with the ancient Irish poets—as will be described farther on—to make circuits through the country, visiting the houses of the principal people, and receiving payment for their poetry, besides welcome and entertainment : composing laudatory poems for those who received them well, and lampooning those who refused them. This remarkable custom is mentioned in innumerable passages in both the lay and ecclesiastical literature as existing in the most remote pagan times ; it was not in the least affected by war or invasion, but



continued uninterruptedly from age to age down to our own time, as may be seen by reference to pp. 450, 451 below.

But one momentous effect of the Danish and Anglo-Norman invasions must here be noted : **they arrested the progress of native learning and art**, which, though disturbed by the Danes, still lingered on for several centuries after the first English settlements, but gradually declined, and finally died out. Ireland presents the spectacle of an arrested civilisation. What that civilisation would have come to if allowed to follow out uninterruptedly its natural course of development it is now impossible to tell, and useless to conjecture ; but there is no reason to think that in this respect Irishmen would not have kept well abreast with the rest of the world. One object of this book is to present the intellectual and artistic state of the country when at its best—though still imperfect—namely, from the seventh or eighth to the eleventh or twelfth century.

## *2. Evidences from Literature.*

The evidences relied on throughout this book are derived from two main sources :—**Literary Records**, and **Material Remains**.

The literary works used as authorities are referred to in the book as occasion arises, and they are all named in one general list at the end ; but as they vary greatly, both in the value to be attached to their testimony, and in point of antiquity, it may be well, at the outset, to give some idea of the kind of evidence we obtain from them, and to indicate, in a general way, how far they are to be trusted as guides in our present inquiry. Two main points I wish to bring out clearly in this short chapter :—First, the authenticity and general trustworthiness of the evidence ; Second, the period or periods of the country's history to which this evidence applies.

The Literary Records may be classed as follows :—Lives of Saints, Martyrologies, and other religious writings :

Romantic Literature: the Brehon Laws: Glosses and Glossaries: Annals, Genealogies, and Local Historical Memoirs: and the works of English, Anglo-Irish, and foreign writers. These several classes will be now briefly examined.

**Lives of Saints.**—The lives and other written memorials of the Irish saints, most in Irish, some in Latin, of which great numbers are still preserved in our manuscripts, and of which many have been published, form a very important source of information. The oldest documents of this kind are the original memoirs of St. Patrick. \* The principal of these are:—The two documents now generally admitted to have been written by Patrick himself—the “Confession,” and the “Epistle to Coroticus,” both fifth century; and two others, the Memoir of the saint by Muirchu Maccu Machteni, and the Notes by Tirechan, both written in the seventh century, but embodying traditions of a much earlier date. These are of the highest authority, but they do not give us much information regarding the social life of the people. Next in point of antiquity, but more detailed and more valuable for our purposes, is the Latin Life of St. Columkille, written in or about A.D. 695, by Adamnan. Columkille was the founder and first abbot of Iona, and Adamnan was the ninth abbot: both were Irishmen; and the illustrious establishment over which they presided was an Irish ecclesiastical colony. Adamnan was a writer of great dignity and integrity: and his pictures of the daily life of the people of Ireland, Scotland, and Iona, both lay and clerical, in the sixth and seventh centuries, though not very full, are absolutely trustworthy so far as they go, and most valuable as being the earliest detailed accounts we possess.

The Celtic people who inhabited the western coasts and islands of Scotland were descended from Irish colonists, as is shown below (pp. 81 to 83), and intimate intercourse was kept up from the beginning between the two countries.

The two peoples were in fact identical, having the same customs, language, and modes of life ; so that Adamnan's descriptions of the Scottish Gaelic people apply equally to Ireland. His remarks also about the daily life of the Northern Picts, whom he converted, may be applied, with little or no reservation, to the Scots or Irish : for we know that the Picts lived much the same sort of life as their neighbours, the Gaels, both of Ireland and Scotland. The Britons are often mentioned in Irish writings, for there was much intercourse between them and the Irish in early ages, so that they often intermarried (pp. 74 to 79 below). Tacitus, writing in the end of the first century, states that there was little difference between them in disposition, manners, and customs : and, as corroborating this, we find that the British customs incidentally noticed by Irish writers are found to be generally identical with those of the Irish themselves.

Here it may be proper to remark that many ancient Gaelic customs that have died out, or are only faintly remembered, in Ireland, are still preserved, with most of their antique features, in the Islands and Highlands of Scotland, of which several examples will be given in this book, from Martin, Pennant, Scott, Carmichael, and other delineators of Scottish manners. The desolating wars in Ireland, especially those of the time of Elizabeth, in which the country was almost cleared of inhabitants, broke, as it were, the continuity of the race, so that many old customs and traditions were neglected and forgotten in Ireland, which in Scotland have been preserved without a break from the time of the earliest colonists to the present day.

The great majority of the saints whose biographies have been preserved flourished in the period from the fifth to the eighth or ninth century. But it is well known that in the case of most of them—though not of all—long intervals elapsed after their death, intervals often of centuries, before the memoirs of their Lives and Acts—that is, those

memoirs that are now extant—were committed to writing. A vast proportion of the ancient books of Ireland were destroyed by the Danes in the ninth and tenth centuries, and among them, no doubt, numerous original Memoirs of saints: so that the later biographers had to depend very much on verbal tradition. These compilers constructed their narratives as best they could, under great difficulties, collecting their materials from remnants of written records in the several monasteries, from the scanty entries in old Annals, Genealogies, and other such documents, and largely from oral tradition, the most uncertain source of all.



FIG. 7.

Castledermot Church and Round Tower in Kildare: from Miss Stokes's "*High Crosses of Castledermot and Durrow*": drawn by Petrie. St. Diarmaid, or Dermot, son of Aed Roín, is recorded to have founded a church here about A.D. 800: corroborated by existing ruins, which still retain his name (Irish name *Disert-Diarmada*, Dermot's Hermitage). See pp. 22, 23, below.

Though constructed round a framework of truth, these Lives, as they have reached us, are much mixed with legend and fable, a circumstance which detracts from their value as mere historical records; though it does not at all affect our researches. The long intervals account in great part for the marvellous element: for oral tradition tends, in the slow lapse of ages, to magnify everything, and to attribute all unusual occurrences of past times to preternatural agency.



There is good reason to believe that the biographers committed to writing faithfully the accounts they received, whether from tradition or written record—truth and fiction alike—without adding or distorting. But taking these old Lives as they stand, we are generally enabled, by an examination of internal evidence, and by careful comparison with other authorities, to distinguish fact from fiction : at



FIG. 2.

Holy Well of St. Dicuill, Deicolus, or Deicola, at Luro, in France: from Miss Stokes's "Three Months in the Forests of France," p. 49. This St. Dicuill (different from Dicuill the Geographer) was a native of Leinster: educated at Bangor in Down: accompanied St. Columbanus to Continent: founded Monastery at Luro, where he is now venerated as patron saint: died A.D. 625. The well is still called by his name: it is much resorted to by pilgrims, and its waters are used to cure children's diseases. (Observe in the picture the offerings, like those made at Irish Holy Wells.) For St. Dicuill see the above-named book of Miss Stokes's, p. 41, and O'Hanlon's "Lives of Irish Saints," I., 30r.

Illustrating how Lives of Irish Saints are corroborated by existing remains, see pp. 21, 23, below.

least in the case of the matters dealt with in this book—the main thing that concerns us. Interspersed through the narratives there are frequent references to dwellings, furniture, dress, ornaments, occupations, customs, pastimes, food, and many other concomitants of the everyday life of the people, which are **incidentally mentioned** with all the



marks of truth and reality. The fact that these brief records are incidental, casual, and unintentional, is what stamps them with authenticity and gives them their value. When we follow the guidance of these side lights, using ordinary circumspection, we are pretty sure to keep on safe ground, even though many of the main incidents related directly are fabulous or doubtful.

I will illustrate these remarks by an example. In the Irish Life of St. Brigit, it is related that on one occasion, soon after she had settled in Kildare, Ailill, king of Leinster, passed near her establishment, with a hundred horse-loads of peeled rods ; whereupon Brigit sent two of her girls to ask him for some of the rods ; but he refused them. Forthwith all the horses fell down helpless under their loads : and there they remained unable to rise, till Ailill granted Brigit's request : on which she released them. The Irish narrative adds incidentally that *it was from these rods St. Brigit's house in Kildare was built.\** Passing by, as foreign to our purpose, the miraculous part of this story, which was the thing mainly in the mind of the writer, we may infer from the rest that in those times it was the custom to build houses of rods or wattles, cleaned up and peeled before being used : and there is abundant evidence elsewhere to show that this would be a correct conclusion.

Bearing in mind that the customs and habits of a people change slowly, that the original biographers must have had written authority of a much earlier age for some portion of their statements, and that the dates of the composition of the Lives or other Memoirs range from the fifth to the fourteenth or fifteenth century, we shall be safe in assuming that these incidental allusions generally represent the state of society existing in Ireland from the time of the commemorated saints down at least to the periods of the writers.

This incidental testimony is specially noticed here in connexion with the Lives of the Saints ; but in reality it

\* Stokes, Three Irish Homilies, page 77.

pervades all classes of Irish writings, as will be seen as we go on. Along with the Lives of the Saints, we may class Martyrologies and Calendars, Hymns, Sermons, and other religious writings, which will be specified and referred to whenever necessary.

**Romantic Literature.**—The ancient Irish Tales, Historical and Romantic, which are described in some detail in chap. xv., furnish our next group of authorities. A large proportion of the stories are contained in the Book of the Dun Cow, which was transcribed about the year 1100, and in the Book of Leinster, transcribed in or before 1160; and others are found in later manuscripts. All these books were copied from much older volumes: and there



FIG. 9.

Remains of a Round Tower at Drunicliff, 4 miles north of Sligo town; built near the church founded by St. Columkille; but long after his time. Existing remains corroborating written testimony, see pp. 21, 23, below.

is good reason to believe that the principal stories were committed to writing at various periods from the seventh to the tenth century, having been handed down orally for ages previously by the professional poets and shanachies. Though the stories are partly or wholly fictitious, they abound, like the Lives of the Saints, in incidental pictures of real life, which, speaking generally, are as true, and consequently as valuable for our purposes, as if the main narratives were strictly historical.

It is, however, necessary to observe that when we have to deal with the direct descriptions of men and their surroundings found in many of the heroic romances—

direct and intentional descriptions as distinguished from casual or incidental—we must be cautious in accepting statements, and careful in drawing conclusions from them. The heroes and the events which are the subjects of these Tales, belong for the most part to the first three or four centuries of our era, and some are assigned to a much earlier period. The old romancers, who committed the stories to writing many centuries later, magnified and glorified everything pertaining to their favourite heroes ; and have left us gorgeous descriptions of houses, furniture, arms, dress, and ornaments, of which a great number may be seen translated into English in O'Curry's " Lectures on the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish." In the case of most of these, no one would seriously think of accepting them as literal sober truth : they merely embody the shanachies' exaggerated conceptions of the great champions of the heroic ages ; like the Homeric descriptions of Greek and Trojan heroes. Moreover these direct descriptions, so far as they are to be credited, as well indeed as the incidental references, must be taken generally as applying to the time of the original writers—or a little earlier in the case of each individual writer—namely from the seventh to the tenth century, though, as we shall see, a good proportion of them apply to a much earlier period.

But we may err on the side of excessive scepticism as well as by undue credulity. The most exaggerated description, if read in the right way, and checked and tested and toned down by other authorities, may yield solid information. And in regard to ornaments and equipments : that the Shanachies did not often invent, but merely magnified, is proved by the fact, that in our museums we have weapons and ornaments answering to most of those described in the stories, though generally on a scale less magnificent. Mere creations of imagination as well as gross exaggeration can be eliminated or brought

down to the solid level of reality, by rigorously adhering to the rule of accepting nothing that does not of itself appear reasonable, or that is not corroborated by other authority.

All the old Tales have been transmitted to us—as remarked elsewhere (chap. xv., sect. 1)—by Christian copyists, who have in most of them—though not in all—

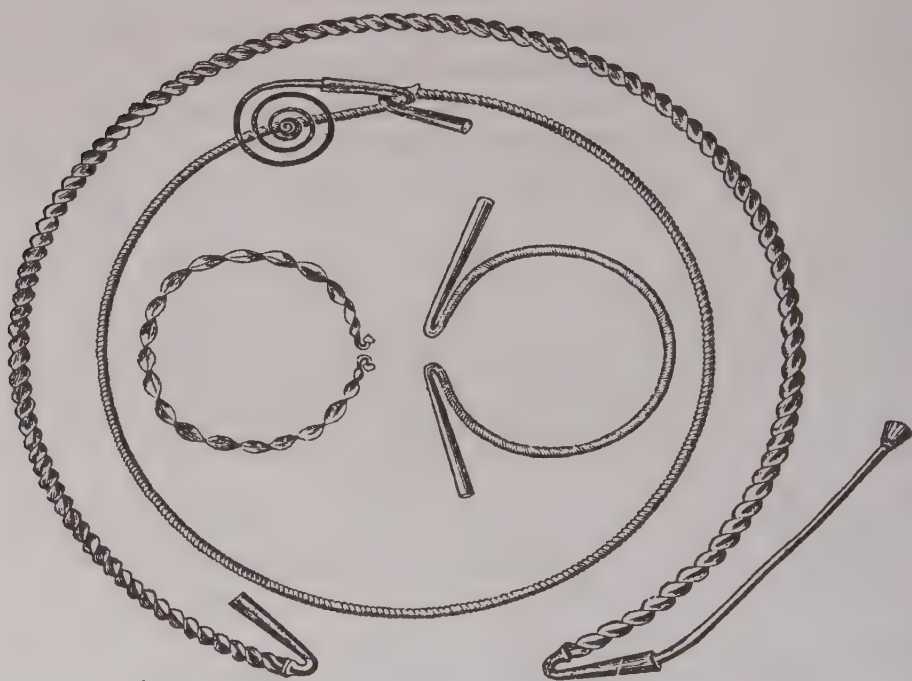


FIG. 10.

Group of Torques for the neck : all solid gold : now in the National Museum, Dublin : fully confirming the descriptions of Torques given in the Tales. The outer one is  $15\frac{1}{4}$  inches in diameter, and 5 feet 7 inches in total length. See, for Torques, chap. xxii., sect. 3, or "Torques" in Index. (From Wilde's *Catal., Gold*, p. 71.)

added on, as it were from the outside, Christian allusions, leaving the general pagan framework almost unchanged. Accordingly, even those of the Tales that show Christian influence, are full of pagan ideas, and of references to pagan customs, while some are thoroughly pagan in character, without a trace of Christianity : so that we may safely apply



—with due discrimination—many of the features of social life in the oldest tales to a period much earlier than the seventh century.

Many of the Tales will be referred to as we go along : but as exemplifying how much may be learned from them, I will here mention one piece contained in the *Lebar Brecc*, *The Vision of Mac Conglinné*, which was evidently written by a skilled epicure, and which, though purely fictitious, has afforded a vast amount of information, undoubtedly authentic, especially on food and drink, and on the various modes of preparing, cooking, and presenting them at table. Professor Kuno Meyer, the editor, believes that this tale began to assume its present form about the end of the twelfth century : but that the original and shorter narrative was written at a much earlier period.

**The Brehon Laws.**—In the ancient Laws of Ireland we have another rich mine of materials. These Laws or Customs grew up among the people from the very beginning of society and took cognisance of them from almost every conceivable point of view, following them as it were into their very houses and laying bare to view the details of their home life. They professed to regulate social and domestic relations of every kind, as well as professions, trades, industries, occupations, and wages. As laws they err in being too minute ; but this very defect renders them all the more valuable for our purposes.

The two most important of the Brehon Law tracts are the **Senchus Mór** [*Shanahus More*] and the **Book of Acaill** [*Ackill*]. In *Cormac's Glossary*, a document of the ninth or tenth century, the *Senchus Mor* is quoted and referred to several times as a well-known work, even at that early time ; and as further showing the great antiquity of the text, it may be mentioned that many of the terms occurring in it had, when the Glossary was compiled, fallen so much out of use, that they are included among the obsolete and forgotten old words needing explanation. As to the



Book of Acaill, it is generally admitted that it is at least as old as the *Senchus Mór* : probably older. Other portions of the written law, including the Commentaries and Glosses, are, however, much less ancient than these : and some are not older than the fifteenth or sixteenth century : though no doubt they transmit traditional interpretations of a much earlier time.

But this important fact must be remembered :—At whatever times the several tracts of the Laws were first written down, it was merely transferring to parchment usages that had been in existence for centuries : for the customs of a people take long to grow, and still longer to establish themselves as laws. It seems evident therefore that the information regarding social life supplied by the Laws taken as a whole, applies to a period coinciding in great part with that covered by the *Lives of the Saints* and the *Romantic Literature*—a period reaching in some instances as far back as the date assigned by tradition to the original compilation of the *Senchus Mór* : namely, the time of St. Patrick, *i.e.* the fifth century. (See on this, pp. 172 to 178, below.)

A few of the legal rules and decisions laid down in the Laws are obviously unreal and fictitious and hardly intended to have any application to practical life. Some seem to be mere intellectual problems, invented to show the cleverness of the writers, or to test the ingenuity of the learners in solving theoretical difficulties : a practice by the way, not peculiar to the ancient Irish ; for one may find examples of it elsewhere, even at the present day. But such cases form only a very small portion of the whole body of the Laws, and they are easily detected. The Laws moreover are sometimes perplexingly inconsistent, which probably arises from the fact that many of the tracts transmit to us local customs of different periods, or from different parts of the country, or perhaps the decisions of different jurists. But these unrealities

and inconsistencies chiefly concern those persons who study the Laws as legal documents: they hardly touch our inquiry: and so far as the objects of this book are concerned, the Laws, as a whole, may be taken as representing faithfully the actual state of society.

**Glosses and Glossaries.**—The Ancient Irish Glosses and Glossaries, which are described at pp. 473 to 476, below, have been all turned to account, especially the Glosses in Zeuss's "*Grammatica Celtica*," and the Glossaries of Cormac Mac Cullenan, O'Clery, and O'Davoren. Zeuss's Glosses, with the corresponding Latin phrases, are given fully by Zimmer in his book "*Glossæ Hibernicæ*"; and the whole of the Irish Glosses, wherever found all over Europe, including those of Zeuss, are brought together, with English translations of the old Irish passages, in "*Thesaurus Palæohibernicus*," by Doctors Stokes and Strachan. Cormac's Glossary contains a great deal of authentic and most valuable information. Many of the words explained in it had then—that is in the ninth or tenth century—become so antiquated as to be unintelligible to the generality of readers: and the numerous customs mentioned must have taken many generations to grow up. The notices of manners and customs found in this Glossary may accordingly be taken to apply to a period extending backwards for several centuries—*i.e.* a period generally coincident with that covered by the preceding three classes of authorities. Cormac's Glossary is, for my purposes, somewhat like a cake of highly concentrated food—pemmican or desiccated soup—dry and unattractive looking, but yielding under proper treatment plenty of intellectual nutriment. It abounds in references, illustrations, indirect allusions, and quotations from archaic lore—all very brief—relating to history, law, romance, druidism, mythology, handicrafts, domestic life; showing the writer to have been a man of exceptional powers of observation and illustration; and I think that,

for its size, I have obtained more information from this book than from any other. To about the same period, or earlier, and for much the same reasons, may be ascribed the information derived from the Glosses, most of which, according to Zeuss, were written in the eighth century, and others in the beginning of the ninth: while some of the oldest of them have been assigned by other Continental scholars to the seventh.

**Annals, Histories, Genealogies, &c.**—Besides the classes of writings already noticed, there are Annals, Genealogies, Local Memoirs, Historical Poems, and such like, all helping to accumulate evidence. Among the later writings in the Irish language are three local memoirs, translated and edited by O'Donovan: one on the district and people of Hy Fiachrach in Sligo; another on Hy Many or the O'Kelly's country in Galway; and the third on Corca-luidhe [Corkalee] or the O'Driscoll's territory in South Cork. These describe the people of the three several districts, their government, and modes of life, in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. One great value of these three comparatively late tracts consists in this:—that they fully corroborate the evidences of much earlier writings; and show that the habits and customs of the older times were preserved almost unchanged down to the period of the writers.

Although this book professedly deals with Ireland before the Anglo-Norman Invasion (1171), it will be observed that I sometimes notice matters belonging to much later periods, and later authorities referring to them are often quoted. But the object of this is clear enough—to illustrate the earlier history. A statement in a late book asserting or implying the prevalence of a certain custom at the time of the writer, though it could not be accepted of itself as evidence of the existence of the same custom at a period several centuries earlier, might corroborate a similar record or incidental reference in an ancient document, which, if

unsupported would be too weak or uncertain to warrant a conclusion. The late authority in such a case is something like a flying buttress erected to sustain a weak or yielding old wall : both will stand by mutual support, where either, if left to itself, might fall. A good example of this sort of corroboration is Froissart's account of the custom of knight-ing boys at seven. (See pp. 518, 519, farther on.)

There is yet another source of information existing in the Irish language—the loan-words from other languages. But this branch of the subject has not yet been sufficiently investigated by philologists to be turned to much account ; and accordingly I have made little use of it.

**English and Foreign Writers.**—The authorities hitherto referred to are all native. In early Greek and Roman writings there is not much reliable information about Ireland, which was in those times very remote and hard to reach. The stories regarding Ireland in those days are mere hearsay reports, and often remind one of the Greek accounts of the Cimmerians, the Cyclops, Scylla and Charybdis, the Harpies, and so forth. For example, Solinus a Latin writer of about the third century, states that there were few birds in Ireland, that there are no such things as bees in it, that dust or small pebbles from Irish soil, if taken to other countries and scattered among hives, will frighten away and banish all the bees. In like manner Strabo has a number of odd fables about Ireland.\* But as I make little use of the writings of these authors, there is no need to notice them further here. Sometimes, however, passages in the works of foreign writers, when they had opportunities of coming at facts, and leave records of what they knew, afford valuable corroboration of Irish records, of which Bede's account of the students from Britain residing in Ireland, and Ethicus's mention of

\* A brief but useful collection of Greek and Roman writers' stories about Ireland, compiled by John O'Donovan, will be found in the *Ulst. Journ. Archæol.*, viii. 239.



books existing in Ireland in the fourth century, are good examples. (See pp. 414 and 403 to 405, farther on.)

When we come to the literature of later times, we have, in addition to the native writings in Irish or Latin, many other works, chiefly in English, written by English and foreign writers, and some by Irishmen belonging to the English colony.

Giraldus Cambrensis was the first foreigner who wrote a detailed description of Ireland. He spared no pains to collect materials for his work, during his visit in 1185 : and his "Topography of Ireland," written in Latin, contains a great amount of most interesting and valuable matter—valuable partly as an independent authority, and partly as a confirmation of the native accounts. But he was bitterly prejudiced against the Irish people, whom he misrepresents to their disadvantage whenever he finds an opportunity, and he often breaks out into blind, passionate abuse of them. He was very narrow-minded too, and everything not exactly squaring in with his own experience of fashion and custom he pronounced barbarous. Yet, when he was able to conquer his prejudices, he bestowed praise where he thought it was deserved. He describes in enthusiastic terms of laudation the ornamentation of Irish books and the skill of the Irish harpers ; and he praises the Irish clergy for the purity of their lives. He was excessively credulous, and his book abounds in marvellous stories, some of them very silly, for which Lynch and other Irish writers censure him. But in justice to him it should be mentioned that many of his stories are versions—occasionally distorted—of Irish legends, which must have been related to him or translated from Irish books by natives : and he transferred them all to his book with indiscriminating credulity as if they were sober history. However, in perusing the "Topography," it is not difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff.

In the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries a



number of English and Anglo-Irish writers described Ireland and its people ; but though the works of several of these are very solid and valuable, many are disfigured by prejudice and misrepresentation, and their testimony has to be carefully sifted.

### 3. *Evidences from Material Remains.*

Hitherto we have treated of the evidences afforded by written Literature. **Material Remains** constitute the other



FIG. 11.

Circular bronze disc; very thin; about 11 inches in diameter; of beautiful workmanship: one of half-a-dozen, now in National Museum, all resembling each other, but differing in details. Name and use unknown. (From Wilde's Catalogue.) See below, p. 23, top.

main source of information. They consist of antiquarian objects of various kinds, found underground from time to time, and now preserved in museums ; and of numerous monuments and ruins of buildings scattered over the face of the country. These, so far as they go, and so far as we are able to ascertain their uses, give us perhaps the most

certain and satisfactory evidence of all. Besides affording, of themselves, independent testimony, they serve to confirm, and in many cases to correct and tone down the written accounts.

Here a very important function of the inquirer is to bring the existing remains into connexion with the records, by identifying the several objects with those mentioned in the ancient writings. In case of the great majority of museum articles the chain of connexion is complete : that is to say, we are able to pronounce with certainty that such and



FIG. 12.

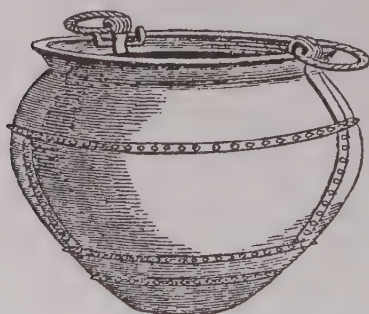


FIG. 13.



FIG. 14.

FIG. 12.—Ancient Irish brooch (pin cut short here to save space: see "Brooch" in Index).

FIG. 13.—Ancient Irish bronze caldron for boiling meat, 12½ inches deep, formed of plates beautifully riveted together. It shows marks and signs of long use over a fire. (See "Caldron" in Index.)

FIG. 14.—Light hollow gold ball, worn on the end of the hair, 3¾ inches in diameter. (See "Golden Balls for the Hair," at end of chap. xxii.)

All three objects now in National Museum, Dublin, and all three exactly answering the descriptions in the records. (From Wilde's Catalogue.)

such an object is the very one mentioned in the writings or belongs to the same class, and with the same use. Thus, we find brooches of various kinds, sizes, and materials spoken of everywhere in the ancient tales and biographies : and there before our eyes in the museums are numerous

brooches answering in every respect to those described. In many such cases the existence of the objects affords valuable corroboration of the accuracy of the records, which otherwise we might be often inclined to doubt as mere bardic inventions. Thus, to continue the above illustration:—We often find mentioned in the Tales that a chief had his cloak fastened in front by a brooch of such a length as to extend across his breast from shoulder to shoulder, a record which, if unsupported by other testimony, would probably be considered an exaggeration. But when we find among the collection of brooches in the National Museum in Dublin, two



FIG. 15.



FIG. 16.



FIG. 17.

In 1781 six bronze articles, all thin and flat, were dug up near Slane in Meath, of shape like those seen in the figures (of which the originals are in the National Museum, Dublin), and from 3 to 5 inches long. The spiral wire seen on one is also on another, now in Trinity College, Dublin, and it is probable was originally on all. Name and use unknown. Wilde (Catalogue, 566, 590) thinks they were brooches, and calls them "Spectacle brooches" from their shape. (From Wilde's Catalogue.)

specimens 22 and 20 inches long, respectively, we can no longer doubt the old romancer's truthfulness. And as a further confirmation, we find that the Brehon Law prescribes penalties for personal injuries caused by brooches whose points project beyond the shoulders.

But in some cases we are unable to connect the remains with the literature: in other words, some articles are mentioned and named in the ancient writings which we cannot identify with any existing objects: and on the other hand we have several antique articles in the museums (some

pictured here : pp. 20, 22) whose names and uses are unknown, and which we are unable to identify with any of those occurring in the records. These remarks apply to the ancient buildings and structures of various kinds scattered over the country : while a large proportion are identified and their uses known, numerous others are still a puzzle to antiquarians.

Other classes of ancient remains, such as pictures, coloured or plain, inscriptions on stone or brick, sculptured representations of scenes of real life, all which are so abundant elsewhere—for example in Egypt—and which have led to such wonderful discoveries, are scanty in Ireland. Costumes, arms, and active life are represented in the sculptures of the High Crosses, and in some of the illustrations in the illuminated manuscripts, which go to confirm the written accounts of dress and ornaments ; but, on the whole, we do not obtain much information on the social and domestic life of the people from this class of remains.

#### 4. *Concurrence of Testimonies.*

It is most important to bear in mind that the validity of our conclusions regarding ancient customs and manners does not depend on any one authority or class of authorities, but in nearly all cases on the concurrence of several. For example : In one of the ancient tales we come, suppose, across a statement or an allusion relating to some long-forgotten custom, which looks so strange and odd that we might at first be inclined to pass it by as a random expression of no significance. But we find it repeated in other tales ; and something to the same effect is alluded to in one or more of the Lives of the Saints, documents of a totally different origin ; while perhaps these are confirmed by an incidental reference or explanation in a Glossary or in the Brehon Laws ; or a corroborative passage occurs in a foreign writer ; and it may happen that some monument



or some article in a museum supports the written accounts by its mute but unquestionable testimony. Thus all doubt is removed and the matter becomes a certainty. It is this **undesigned concurrence of several independent authorities** that constitutes the main strength of the evidence for the statements and conclusions all through this book.

From all that has been said here, then, it will, I think, be conceded that we have materials that will enable us to construct a Social History of Ireland for the interval between the introduction of Christianity and the Anglo-Norman Invasion, *i.e.* from the fifth to the twelfth century. And while, on the one hand, we know that the state of society in the time of the Anglo-Normans continued without extensive or violent changes to the sixteenth or seventeenth century, we may be pretty certain, on the other hand, though we have little direct historical evidence to prove it, that the institutions and ways of life found in the country by the early missionaries were in most cases identical with those existing far back towards the beginning of the Christian Era, or before it.

The ancient Irish were a branch of the continental Celts : and they brought with them the language, mythology, and customs of their original home, all of which, however, became modified in course of ages after the separation. But the main characteristics were maintained, and a comparison of the native accounts of the ancient Irish people with the classical writers' descriptions of the Continental Celts shows close resemblances in many important particulars. Each class of writings throws light on the other, so as often to clear up obscure passages in both : and in many cases statements in the ancient Irish Tales, which, if unsupported, might be regarded as doubtful, are corroborated by passages concerning the Gaulish Celts in Cæsar, Solinus, Posidonius, and other classical writers. These observations will be found illustrated in many parts of this book.



### 5. *Population of Ireland in Ancient Times.*

It is important that we should have some general idea of the population of Ireland during the period treated of in this book. According to the best Anglo-Irish authorities the population at the time of the Restoration—1660—was something over a million. But for a whole century before that time the country had been devastated by continuous war, probably the most destructive ever experienced by any nation within historic times ; so that the people of three of the provinces, Ulster, Munster, and Connaught, as well as of a considerable part of Leinster, were almost exterminated. At the beginning of these wars there must have been two or three times more people than in 1660.

There are various considerations leading to the belief that Ireland was well populated in the early ages of Christianity. All over the country—in Connaught as well as in the other provinces—there are many districts in which we find multitudes of small church ruins : districts which are now half waste and solitary, and have been so for centuries : these churches, of course, were not erected without having people to fill them.\* Then again, many parts of the country are now studded over with *raths* or residential forts—the ancient homesteads—quite as thickly as with modern residences, notwithstanding that a large proportion of the original structures have been obliterated by cultivation.† Observe also that round every good-sized rath a number of workpeople and other followers lived with their families in wicker houses without any special fortifications, so that no traces of their dwellings remain.

It has been observed by many modern writers that plain traces of tillage, such as ridges formed by digging

\* *Iar Connaught*, p. 14, note *g*.

† On the multitude of raths or forts, see Brash, *Ogams*, pp. 99, 101 ; Westropp's papers on " Prehistoric Forts in the Co. Clare," in *Journ. R. Soc. Antiqu.*, Irel., for 1896 and 1897 ; and Wilde's *Boyne and Blackwater*, p. 138. See also *Kilk. Arch. Journ.* for 1879-82, p. 259.

and ploughing, are found all over Ireland in places now waste and uninhabited ; such as the tops and sides of mountains, and even under deep bogs ; and several of those writers, on this score alone, are of the opinion expressed by one of their number that “ for certain Ireland has been better inhabited than it is at present.”\*

Other circumstances point independently to the same conclusion ; such as the outflow of the population in the early centuries to Scotland, Wales, and Man, as mentioned below (pp. 72 to 83) ; the numerous schools and colleges in the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries—of which a partial list may be seen at the opening of chap. xi. (p. 408),—all with crowds of students ; and the vast assemblages at the periodical fairs, described in Vol. II., pp. 434 to 449, of which we may instance, as one example out of many, that of *Taillteinn* in 1169, when the chariots and horse alone extended along a distance of six miles. In this connexion we must not overlook the ancient tradition cited farther on (chap. vii., p. 185), that in the reign of the sons of *Aed Slaine* (joint kings, A.D. 656–664) the people grew so numerous that for the first time the use of fences became general.

We should remember, too, *Cæsar's* statement regarding Britain in his time—the first century B.C.—“ the number of people is countless and their buildings are exceedingly numerous ” (*Gallic War*, v., xii.) ; and there seems no reason why Ireland should have been behindhand in this respect at that time and subsequently.

Besides all that has been said, there is another most important observation to be made. It seems inconceivable that such a complete, close, and symmetrical network of laws and institutions as will be found described in the following pages, embracing every member of the community, from the highest to the lowest, could have grown up and

\* *Boate*, *Nat. Hist.*, p. 47 ; *Smith*, *Hist. of Cork*, i., 198 ; *Joyce*, *Irish Names of Places*, i., 228.

held the people together for so many centuries, without having a good solid population to work upon.

From all these considerations, then, we may conclude that Ireland was well peopled during the period passing under review in this book.

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## CHAPTER II

### A PRELIMINARY BIRD'S-EYE VIEW



IRELAND, from the sixth to the twelfth century of the Christian Era, presented an interesting spectacle, which, viewed through the medium of history, may be sketched in broad outline as follows.

In those early times the physical aspect of Ireland was very different from what it is at present. All over the country there were vast forests, and great and dangerous marshes, quagmires, and bogs, covered with reeds, moss, and grass. But though bogs existed from the beginning, many districts, where we now find them lying broad and deep, were once forest land; and the bog grew up after the surface had, in some manner, become denuded of trees. Buried down at a depth of many feet in some of our present bogs great tree trunks are often found, the relics of the primeval forest.

But outside forest and bog, there were open plains, valleys, and hillsides, under cultivation and pasturage, and all well populated. The woods and waste places were alive with birds and wild animals of all kinds, and the people were very fond of hunting and fishing; for there was plenty of game, both large and small, and the rivers and lakes teemed with fish. Sometimes they hunted hares

and foxes for mere sport. But they had much grander game : wild boars with long and dangerous tusks, deer in great herds, and wolves that lurked in caves and thick woods. There were the same broad lakes, like inland seas, that still remain : but they were generally larger then than they are now ; and they were surrounded with miles of reedy morasses : lakes and marshes tenanted everywhere by vast flocks of cranes, wild geese, wild swans, and other fowl. Kites and golden eagles skimmed over the plains peering down for prey ; and the goshawks, or falcons, used in the old game of hawking, were found in great abundance.

A person traversing those parts of the country that were inhabited found no difficulty in getting from place to place ; for there were roads and bridle-paths everywhere, rough indeed, and not to be compared with the roads of



FIG. 18.

Ferryboat, 21 feet long by 1 foot broad : now in National Museum, Dublin. (From Wilde's Catalogue.)

our day, but good enough for the travel and traffic of the time. If the wayfarer did not choose to walk, there were plenty of ox-waggons ; and among the higher classes rough springless chariots, drawn by one or two horses. Horse-riding, though sometimes adopted, was not in those times a very general mode of travelling. What with rough conveyances, and with roads and paths often full of ruts, pools, and mire, a journey, whether by walking, driving, or horse-riding, was a slow, laborious, and disagreeable business, and not always free from danger. Rivers were crossed by means of wooden bridges, or by wading at broad shallow fords, or by little ferry-boats, or, as a last resource, by swimming : for in those days of open-air life everyone could swim. Fords were, however, generally very easy to find, as the roads and paths usually impinged on



them, and in many places lights were kept burning beside them at night.

In the inhabited districts the traveller experienced little difficulty on the score of lodging: for there were open houses of hospitality for the reception of strangers, where bed and food were always ready. If one of these happened not to be within reach, he had only to make his way to the nearest monastery, where he was sure of a warm welcome: and, whether in monastery or hostel, he was entertained free of charge. Failing both, there was small chance of his having to sleep out: for hospitality was everywhere enjoined and practised as a virtue, and there was always a welcome from the family of the first private house he turned into.

The people were divided into tribes and clans, each group, whether small or large, governed by a king or chief; and at the head of all was the high king of Ireland. But these kings could not do as they pleased: for they had to govern the country or the district in accordance with old customs, and had to seek the advice of the chief men on all important occasions—much the same as the limited monarchs of our own day. There were courts of justice presided over by magistrates and judges, with lawyers to explain the law and plead for their clients.

The houses were nearly all of wood, and oftener round than quadrangular, the dwelling of every comfortable family being surrounded by a high rampart of earth with a thorn hedge or strong palisade on top, to keep out wild animals and robbers. Beside almost every homestead was a kitchen garden for table vegetables, and one or more enclosed spaces for various purposes, such as outdoor games, shutting in cattle at night, or as haggards for corn-stacks. In some places the dwellings were clustered in groups or hamlets, not huddled close as the houses in most of our present villages, but with open spaces between. The large towns—which, however, were



very few—lay open all round, without any attempt at fortification.

The people were bright and intelligent and much given to intellectual entertainments and amusements. They loved music and singing, and took delight in listening to poetry, history, and romantic stories, recited by professional poets and shanachies; or, in the absence of these, by good non-professional storytellers, who were everywhere to be found among the peasantry. They were close observers of external nature, too, and had an intense admiration for natural beauty, a peculiarity everywhere reflected in their literature, as well as in their place-names.

In most parts of the country open-air meetings or fairs were held periodically, where the people congregated in thousands, and, forgetting all the cares of the world for the time, gave themselves over to unrestrained enjoyment—athletic games and exercises, racing, music, recitations by skilled poets and storytellers, jugglers' and showmen's representations, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. So determined were they to ward off all unpleasantness on these occasions, that no one, at the risk of his life, durst pick a quarrel or strike a blow: for this was one of the rules laid down to govern all public assemblies. An Irish fair in those times was a lively and picturesque sight. The people were dressed in their best, and in great variety, for all, both men and women, loved bright colours, and from head to foot every individual wore articles of varied hues. Here you see a tall gentleman walking along with a scarlet cloak flowing loosely over a short jacket of purple, with perhaps a blue trousers and yellow headgear, while the next showed a colour arrangement wholly different; and the women vied with the men in variety of hues. Nay, single garments were often parti-coloured; and it was quite common to see the long outside mantle, whether worn by men or women,

striped and spotted with purple, yellow, green, or other dyes.

But outside such social gatherings, and in ordinary life, both chiefs and people were quarrelsome and easily provoked to fight. Indeed they loved fighting for its own sake; and a stranger to the native character would be astonished to see the very people who only a few days before vied with each other in good-natured enjoyment, now fighting to the death on some flimsy cause of variance, which in all likelihood he would fail to understand if he



FIG 19.

Ruins on Inishcaltra or Holy Island in Lough Derg on the Shannon. Island Monastery founded by St. Camin (died 653). Here was one of the Munster Colleges, where many distinguished men were educated. From *Kilk. Archæol. Jour.*, 1889; page 162: Wakeman. (See next page.)

made inquiry. These everlasting jars and conflicts—though not more common in Ireland than in England and Scotland—brought untold miseries on the people, and were the greatest obstacle to progress. Sometimes great battles were fought, on which hung the fate of the nation, like those we have seen contested in Ireland within the last two or three hundred years. But the martial instincts of the people were not always confined within the shores of Ireland; for Irish leaders often carried war into the

neighbouring countries both of Great Britain and the Continent.

In all parts of the country were monasteries, most of them with schools attached, where an excellent education was to be had by all who desired it, for small payment, or for nothing at all if the student was poor: and besides these there were numerous lay schools where young persons might be educated in general learning and for



FIG. 20.

Specimen of the Ancient Irish Art of Bookbinding. From Miss Stokes's *Early Christian Art in Ireland*, p. 110. (See page 34, top *infra*.)

the professions. The teaching and lecturing were carried on with life and spirit, and very much in the open air when the weather permitted. In the monasteries and schools, as well as in some private houses, there were libraries of manuscript books containing all the learning



then known: but when you walked into the library room you saw no books on shelves: but numbers of neat satchels hanging on hooks round the walls, each containing one or more precious volumes and labelled on the outside.

Learning of every kind was held in the highest estimation; and learned men were well rewarded, not only in the

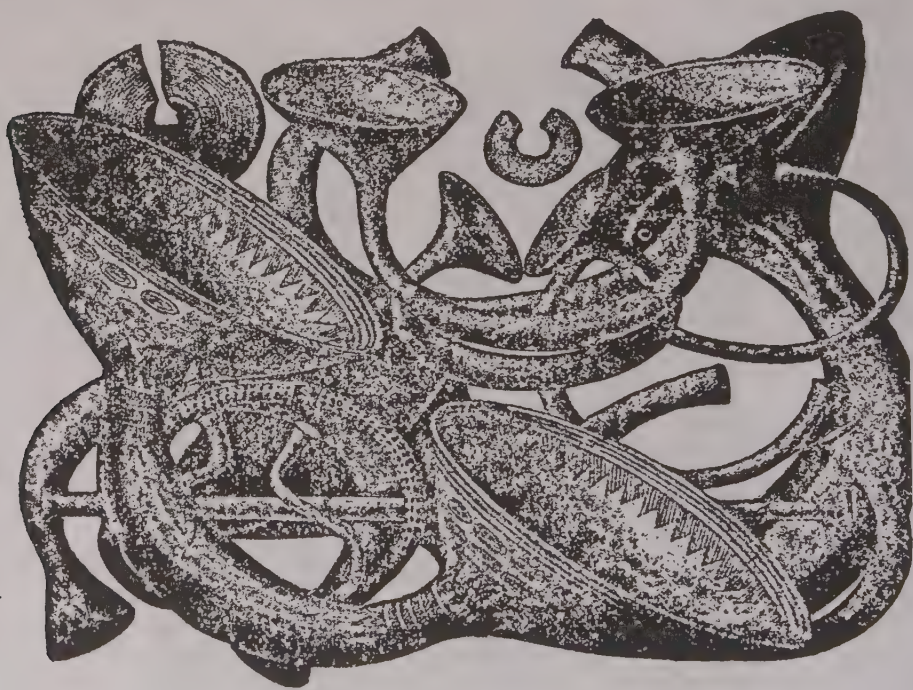


FIG. 21.

Group of miscellaneous Gold Ornaments, all now in National Museum and in Trinity College, Dublin: slightly less than half size. (From Wood-Martin's *Pagan Ireland*, and that from *Ulst. Journ. Archæol.*, viii. 36.) These Ornaments are described in chap. xxii., sect. 3, *infra*. (See next page.)

universal respect paid to them, but also in the solid worldly advantages of wealth and influence. Professional men—physicians, lawyers, builders, &c.—went on their visits, each attended by a group of scholars who lived in his house and accompanied him to learn their profession by actual practice.

Some gave themselves up to the study and practice of art in its various forms, and became highly accomplished : and specimens of their artistic work remain to this day, which are admitted to be the most perfect and beautiful of the kind existing in any part of the world (see fig. 20, p. 32).

In numerous districts there were minerals which, though not nearly so abundant as in the neighbouring island of Great Britain, were yet in sufficient quantity to give rise to many industries. The mines were worked too, as we know from ancient documents ; and the remains of old mines of copper, coal, and other minerals, with many antique mining tools, have been discovered in recent times in some parts of Ireland. Gold was found in many places, especially in the district which is now called the county Wicklow ; and the rich people wore a variety of gold ornaments, which they took great pride in (fig. 21). Many rivers produced the pearl mussel, so that Ireland was well known for its pearls, which were unusually large and of very fine quality : and in some of the same rivers pearls are found to this day.

Though there were no big factories there were plenty of industries and trades in the homes of the people, like what we now call cottage industries. Coined money was hardly known, so that all transactions of buying and selling were carried on by a sort of barter, values being estimated by certain well-known standards, such as cows, sacks of corn of a fixed size, ounces of gold and silver, and such like. To facilitate these interchanges the people had balances and weights not very different from those now used.

The men of the several professions, such as medical doctors, lawyers, judges, builders, poets, historians : and the tradesmen of various crafts—carpenters, smiths, workers in gold, silver, and brass, ship and boat builders, masons, shoemakers, dyers, tailors, brewers, and so forth—all worked and earned their bread under the old Irish laws, which were everywhere acknowledged. Then there was a good deal of commerce with Britain and with Continental



countries, especially France ; and the home commodities, such as hides, salt, wool, etc., were exchanged for wine, silk, satin, and other goods not produced in Ireland.

From what has been said here, we may see that the ancient Irish were as well advanced in civilisation, as orderly, and as regular, as the people of those other European countries of the same period that—like Ireland—had a proper settled government ; and it will be shown farther on in this book that they were famed throughout all Europe for Religion and Learning.

As the population of the country increased, the cultivated land increased in proportion. But until a late time there were few inhabited districts that were not within view, or within easy reach, of unreclaimed lands—forest, or bog, or moorland : so that the people had much ado to protect their crops and flocks from the inroads of wild animals.

All round near the coast ran, then as now, the principal mountain ranges, with a great plain in the middle. The air was soft and moist, perhaps even more moist than at present, on account of the great extent of forest. The cleared land was exceedingly fertile, and was well watered with springs, streamlets, and rivers, not only among the mountainous districts, but all over the central plain. Pasture lands were luxuriant and evergreen, inviting flocks and herds without limit. There was more pasture than tillage, and the grass land was, for the most part, not fenced in, but was grazed in common.

Some of the pleasing features of the country have been well pictured by Denis Florence M'Carthy in his poem of "The Bell Founder" :—

" O Erin ! thou broad-spreading valley, thou well-watered land of fresh streams,  
When I gaze on thy hills greenly sloping, where the light of such loveliness beams,  
When I rest on the rim of thy fountains, or stray where thy streams disembogue,  
Then I think that the fairies have brought me to dwell in the bright Tirnanogue."

Ireland, so far as it was brought under cultivation and pasture in those early days, was—as the Venerable Bede calls it—“ a land flowing with milk and honey ” ; a pleasant, healthful, and fruitful land, well fitted to maintain a prosperous and contented people.

Though the period from the sixth to the twelfth century has been specified at the opening of this chapter, the state of things depicted here continued, with no very decided changes, for several hundred years afterwards ; and many of the customs and institutions, so far from being limited backwards by the sixth century, existed from prehistoric times.

All these features, and many others not noticed in this brief sketch, will now be examined by turning on them, one by one, the field of a big telescope, which will bring out the details ; and the resulting enlarged views will be photographed in the following chapters of this book.

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## CHAPTER III

### MONARCHICAL GOVERNMENT

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#### SECTION I. *Territorial Subdivision.*



BEFORE entering on the subject of Government, it will be useful to sketch the main features of the ancient territorial divisions of the country. It was parcelled out into five provinces from the earliest times of which we have any record :—Leinster ; East Munster ; West Munster ; Connaught ; and Ulster : a partition which, according to the legend, was made by the five Firbolg brothers, the sons of Dela.\* Laigin or

\* Joyce, *Short History of Ireland*, p. 125.

Leinster originally extended—in coast line—from Inber Colptha (the mouth of the Boyne at Drogheda) to the river Suir: East Muman or Munster from the Suir to the Lee at Cork: West Munster from the Lee round to the Shannon: Olnegmacht or Connaught from Limerick and the Shannon to the little river Drowes, which issues from Lough Melvin and flows between the counties of Leitrim and Donegal: and Ulaid or Ulster from this round northwards to the Boyne.



FIG. 22.

*Aill-na-Mheeran*, the 'Stone of the Divisions': now often called the "Cat Stone."  
(From a photograph. Man put in for comparison.)

This division became modified in course of time. The two Munsters, East and West, gradually ceased to be distinguished, and Munster was regarded as a single province. A new province, that of Mide [Mee] or Meath, was formed in the second century of the Christian Era by Tuathal the Acceptable, king of Ireland.\* Down to his time the provinces met at a point on the hill of Ushnagh (in the

\* Joyce, *Short History of Ireland*, p. 130.

present county Westmeath) marked by a great stone called *Aill-na-Mirenn* [Aill-na-Meeran], the 'Stone of the Divisions,' which stands there a conspicuous object still. Round this point Tuathal formed the new province by cutting off a portion of each of the others. It was designed to be the mensal land or personal estate of the *Ard-ri* or supreme king of Ireland, that he might be the better able to maintain his court with due state and dignity. Previous to his time the king of Ireland had only a small tract—a single *tuath* (see next page)—for his own use. This new province was about half the size of Ulster, extending from the Shannon eastwards to the sea, and from the confines of the present county Kildare and King's County on the south to the confines of Armagh and Monaghan on the north. The present counties of Meath and Westmeath retain the name, but comprise only about half the original province.

At the time of Tuathal's accession—A.D. 130—there were four places belonging severally to the four provinces, situated not far from each other, which for centuries previously—as will be shown farther on—had been celebrated as residences and as centres for great periodical meetings for various purposes:—Tara in Leinster; Tailtinn in Ulster (now Teltown on the Blackwater, midway between Navan and Kells); Tlachtga in Munster (now the Hill of Ward near Athboy in Meath); and Ushnagh in Connaught, nine miles west of Mullingar in the present county Westmeath. All these were included in the new province; and Tuathal built a palace in each, of which some of the mounds and fortifications remain to this day. After his time the five provinces generally recognised and best known in Irish History were Leinster, Munster, Connaught, Ulster, Meath.

Besides the formation of a new province there were several minor changes. Murthemne and Cuailnge [Quelna], both forming the present county Louth, were transferred from Ulster to Leinster; the present county Cavan, which



originally belonged to Connaught, was given to Ulster; and the territory now known as the county Clare, was wrested from Connaught and annexed to Munster. Down to the time of Tuathal, Connaught included a large tract east of the Shannon, a part of the present county Westmeath; but in accordance with his arrangements, the Shannon in this part of its course, became the eastern boundary of that province. The most ancient division of Munster, as has been said, was into East and West: but a later and better known partition was into Thomond or North Munster, which broadly speaking included Tipperary, Clare, and the northern part of Limerick; and Desmond or South Munster, comprising Kerry, Cork, Waterford, and the southern part of Limerick. In latter ages, however, the name Thomond has been chiefly confined to the county Clare, the patrimony of the O'Briens. Recently Meath has disappeared as a province: and the original provinces now remain—Leinster, Munster, Connaught, and Ulster.

The provinces were subdivided into territories of various sizes. The political unit, *i.e.* the smallest division having a complete political and legal administration, was the *Tuath*. The original meaning of *tuath* was *populus* (Zeuss, 34, 32), a tribe of people: but in accordance with a well-known custom in Ireland, the term came to be applied to the land occupied by the tribe. In its original application a *tuath* must have represented roughly a definite population: for we are told that its king had 700 fighting men:\* and as the term had reference to a tribe rather than to the district they occupied, the several *tuath*-districts must have varied in size. But when once the term began to be applied to the land, it came in course of time to be used as designating—in theory, at least—a territory of fixed area. In this sense a *tuath* was usually considered as equivalent to what was called a *tricha-céd*, containing 30

\* Br. Laws, v. 51, top.



*ballys* or *ballybetaghs* (Irish *baile-biataigh*).\* Each ballybetagh contained 12 *sesreachs* or ploughlands, and each ploughland 120 large Irish acres. A bally or townland was of a size sufficient to sustain four herds of cows of 75 each, *i.e.* 300 cows in all, "without one cow touching another": and a ploughland was as much as a single plough could turn up in a year. In tabular form this subdivision is:—

1 Tricha-Céd, or Tuath = 30 Ballybetaghs.

1 Ballybetagh = 12 Sesreachs.

1 Sesreach = 120 Irish acres.

This is in accordance with what is laid down in an ancient poem, quoted by O'Curry in *Moylena* (p. 108), which is followed by Keating (p. 86): but other authorities, as followed by O'Donovan and O'Flaherty,† while agreeing in the first item (1 tricha=30 ballys), give the ballybetagh as containing 4 sesreachs or *quarters*; and each quarter 120 Irish acres.

The province of Meath contained 18 tricha-céds; Leinster, 31; Ulster, 35; Connaught, 30; the two Munsters, 70: 184 tricha-céds, cantreds, or tuaths, in all Ireland, containing collectively 5,520 ballybetaghs. A tuath contained about 177 English square miles, and might be represented in area by an oblong district, sixteen miles by eleven. Sometimes three, four, or more *tuaths* were united to form one large territory under a king: this was called a *Mortuath*, or great *tuath*.‡ The present subdivision into baronies is partly of English origin: but the old divisions were very often followed: so that many of the ancient *tuaths* or *tricha-céds* are represented, more or less nearly,

\* Br. Laws, v. 51, 5; Sullivan, *Introd.*, p. 229, note 413; O'Curry, *Man. and Cust.*, ii. 503, note 560.

† O'Donovan, *HyF*, p. 149, and O'Flaherty, *Ogy.*, Part I. For more on this subject, and for the smaller measures of land, see Vol. II., pp. 372 and 373.

‡ Br. Laws, iv. 331, 3, 4; v. 51, *et seq.*; Sullivan, *Introd.*, p. 80.

by the modern baronies, most of which retain their old names. Hence, *tricha-céd* (which literally signifies 'thirty-hundreds': a *céd*, or 'hundred,' being equivalent to a 'bally,' or 'ballybetagh'), is often translated 'cantred,' or 'barony.'

## 2. *Classes of Kings.*

The government of the whole country, as well as that of each division and subdivision, was in the hands of a constitutional king or chief, who had to carry on his government in accordance with the immemorial customs of the country or sub-kingdom: and his authority was further limited by the counsels of his chief men. The usual name for a king in the ancient as well as in the modern language is *rí* [ree], genitive *rig* or *righ* [ree]. Other less usual terms were *fál*, *mal*, and *triath* [trih], all given in Cormac's Glossary; and *torc*, which is glossed by *rí* in LU (49, a, 1). A queen was, and is, *rigan* or *rioghan* [reean], genitive *rigna* or *rioghana* [reena]. Sometimes a queen was called *banrigan* [banreean]. Over all Ireland there was one king, who, to distinguish him from others, was designated the **Ard-rí**, or over-king (*árd*, high). The over-kings lived at Tara till the sixth century A.D.; after that, elsewhere: hence the *Ard-rí* was often called "*King of Tara*," even after its abandonment. Within historic times no woman was sovereign of Ireland. But in the half-legendary history we have one, and only one, queen, who however succeeded to the sovereignty, not by election, but by force:—Macha Mongruad the founder of Emain—about 370 years B.C., who seized the throne after the death of her father, a previous monarch. At the end of this chapter will be found a List of the Supreme Kings of Ireland. The last over-king was Roderick O'Conor. Wearied with the turmoil of the Anglo-Norman Invasion, which he was unable to repel, and with domestic discord, he retired from the world to the monastery of Cong, where he ended his troubled

career in 1198. After his death there were no more supreme monarchs;\* but the provinces and the smaller kingdoms continued to be ruled by their native kings in succession down to a much later period.

There was a king over each of the five provinces—an arrangement commonly known as the Pentarchy. If a provincial king was elected monarch of Ireland a new king had to be elected over his province; for it was the rule that the same person could not be king of Ireland and of a province at the same time. The provinces, again, included



FIG. 23.

Cloister: Abbey of Cong: where Roderick O'Connor died. (From Miss Stokes's *Irish Inscr.*, II. 79.)

many sub-kingdoms, some consisting of a single *tuath*, and some of more, as has been said. The *tuath* was the smallest territory whose ruler could claim the title of *ri*, or king; but all the 184 *tuaths* had not kings.

From this it will be seen that, speaking in a general sense, there were four classes of kings:—the king of the *tuath*; the king of the *mór-tuath*; the king of a province; and the king of all Ireland: forming a regular gradation, kingdom within kingdom. This agrees generally with the

\* See Joyce, *Short History of Ireland*, pp. 281, 282, 283.

curious classification given in the Laws (iv. 329) :—1, the “king of hills or peaks,” *i.e.*, of a *tuath*; 2, the “king of companies,” *i.e.* of a *mór-tuath*; and 3, the “king who is the source of every chief,” that is, the king of kings, which includes the Ard-ri, and the provincial kings.

The kings of the provinces were subject to the over-king, and owed him tribute and war service. A similar law extended to all the sub-kingdoms : in other words, the king of each territory, from the *tuath* upwards to the province, was—at all events nominally—subject to the king of the larger territory in which it was included. Some of the sub-kingdoms were very large, such as Tyrone, Tirconnel, Thomond, Desmond, Ossory, Hy Many, &c., each of which comprised several *tuaths* and several tribes. A minor king under a king of one of these large territories was often called an *ur-ri*, or *oir-ri*, or “under-king,” called an *ur-riagh* by English writers.\*

### 3. Election and Inauguration.

**Election.**—The king, or ruling chief, was always elected from members of one *finē* or family, bearing the same surname (when surnames came into use); but the succession was not hereditary in the present sense of the word : it was elective, with the above limitation of being confined to one family. Any freeborn member of the family was eligible : the successor might be son, brother, nephew, cousin, &c., of the chief. That member was chosen who was considered best able to lead in war and govern in peace; and of course he should be of full age. Two essential conditions are expressly laid down :—that he should be free from all personal deformities or blemishes likely to impair his efficiency as a leader, or to lessen the respect of the people for him :† and that both his father and grandfather had been

\* O'Donovan, Moyrath, 103, note *g*. *Ur-ri* is to be distinguished from *ur-rad* (p. 161, below).

† Br. Laws, I. 73; II. 279; III. 85, §; Spenser, View, 10, 12.



*flaiths* or nobles. For the election of a ruling chief or minor king, the proceedings, which were carried on with much ceremony and deliberation, are described in the Law. Every freeman of the rank of *aire* (chap. v. p. 156, *infra*) had a vote. If there were several candidates, a court was held for the election in the house of the chief *brewy* or hosteller of the district, to which all the chiefs about to take part in the election proceeded, each with his full retinue: and there they remained in council for three days and three nights, at the end of which time the successful candidate was declared elected. The electors—says the Law (v. 441)—were bound to see “that the person they select is the man to whom the chieftainship is due: viz, that he is the son of a *flaith* or noble and the grandson of another, that he has the three chief residences (p. 58, *infra*), and that he is pure, without stain of stealth or [unlawful] wounding.” For the higher classes of kings, such as the supreme monarch or the king of a province, the proceedings were much more formal, solemn, and imposing; and the court for the election was probably held in one of the palaces.

With the object of avoiding the evils of a disputed succession, the person to succeed a king or ruling chief was often elected by the chiefs convened in formal meeting during the lifetime of the king himself: when elected he was called the tanist—Irish *tánaiste*—a word meaning *second*, i.e. second in authority. Proper provision was made for the support of the tanist by a separate establishment and an allowance of mensal land (see p. 50, *infra*), a custom which continued, in case of the tanists of provincial and minor kings, till the time of Elizabeth, and even later: “the tanist,” says Spenser (p. 12), “hath also a share of the country allotted to him, and certain cuttings and spendings [*i.e.* tribute of several kinds] upon all the inhabitants under the lord.” He was subordinate to the king or chief, but was above all the other dignitaries of the state. The other persons who were eligible to succeed



in the case of the tanist's failure were termed *Roydamna* (Ir. *rig-domna*, i.e. 'king-material.').\*

A curious arrangement sometimes adopted was the election of two joint kings of Ireland, who reigned simultaneously. By reference to the table at the end of this chapter it will be seen that there were five joint reigns between A.D. 565 and 664. Sometimes the joint kings were brothers, sometimes not. We have no details as to the arrangements adopted to define the authority of each, or of the measures taken to avoid friction or quarrels.

The **Inauguration** or *making* of a king, after his election, was an impressive ceremony. Of the mode of inaugurating the pagan kings we know hardly anything, further than this, that the kings of Ireland had to stand on an inauguration stone at Tara called *Lia Fail* which uttered a roar when a king of the Milesian race stood on it.

But we possess full information of the ceremonies used in Christian times. The mode of inaugurating was much the same in its general features all over the country; and was strongly marked by a religious character. But there were differences in detail; for some tribes had traditional customs not practised by others. There was a definite formula, every portion of which should be scrupulously carried out in order to render the ceremony legal. Some of the observances that have come within the ken of history, as described below, descended from pagan times. Each tribe, or aggregation of tribes, with a king at their head, had a special place of inauguration, which was held in much respect—invested indeed with a half sacred character. It was on the top of a hill, or on an ancestral cairn (the sepulchre of the founder of the race), or on a large *lis* or fort, and sometimes under a venerable tree, called in Irish a *bile* [billa]. Each tribe used an inauguration stone—a custom common also among the Celts of Scotland.

\* For tanist and election of, see also Lynch, *Cambr. Ev.* iii. 325; O'Flaherty, *Ogyg.*, Part I.; and O'Curry's *Moylena*, *Introd.*, viii., ix.

Some of the inauguration stones had the impression of two feet, popularly believed to be the exact size of the feet of the first chief of the tribe who took possession of the territory. Sometimes there was a stone chair, on which the king sat during part of the ceremony. On the day of the inauguration the sub-chiefs of the territory, and all the great officers of state, with the brehons, poets, and historians, were present, as also the bishops, abbots, and other leading ecclesiastics.



FIG. 24.

Stone Inauguration Chair of the O'Neills of Clannaboy: now in the Belfast Museum. (From the *Journ. R. Soc. Antiq. of Irel.*, 1898, p. 255. See also *Dubl. Pen. Journ.*, I. 208.)

and historians, were present, as also the bishops, abbots, and other leading ecclesiastics.

The hereditary historian of the tribe read for the elected chief the laws that were to regulate his conduct; after which the chief swore to observe them, to maintain the ancient customs of the tribe, and to rule his people with strict justice. Then, while he stood on the stone, an officer — whose special duty it was — handed him a straight white wand, a symbol of authority, and also an

emblem of what his conduct and judicial decisions should be—straight and without stain. Having put aside his sword and other weapons, and holding the rod in his hand, he turned thrice round from left to right, and thrice from right to left, in honour of the Holy Trinity, and to view

his territory in every direction. In some cases one of the sub-chiefs put on his sandal or shoe, in token of submission,\* or threw a slipper over his head for good luck and prosperity. Then one of the sub-chiefs appointed for this purpose pronounced in a loud voice his surname—the surname only, without the Christian name—which was afterwards pronounced aloud by each of the clergy, one after another, according to dignity, and then by the sub-chiefs. He was then the lawful chief; and ever after, when spoken to, he was addressed “O’Neill”—“MacCarthy More”—“O’Conor,” &c.; and when spoken of in English he was designated “The O’Neill,” &c., a custom existing to this day, as we see in “The O’Conor Don,” “The Mac Dermot,” and in Scotland “The Mac Callum More.”



FIG. 25.

Carnfree, the Inauguration Mound of the O'Conors, kings of Connaught: near Tulsk, in Roscommon; about 35 feet in diameter. (From *Kilk. Archæol. Journ.*, 1870-1, p. 250.)

The main parts of the inauguration ceremony were performed by one or more sub-chiefs: this office was highly honourable, and was hereditary. The inaugurator had a tract of land and a residence free, which remained in the family. The O'Neills of Tyrone were inaugurated by O'Hagan and O'Cahan at Tullaghoge, near Dungannon, where the fine old inauguration moat still remains; the O'Donnells of Tirconnell by O'Freel, at the Rock of Doon, near Kilmacrenan. The fort of *Magh Adhair* [Mah-ire]

\* Four Masters, A.D. 1488, p. 1161.

near the village of Quin in Clare, on which the Dalcassian kings were made, has been described by Mr. Westropp;\* and Carnfree, the mound on which the O'Connors, kings of Connaught, were inaugurated, is to be seen in the townland of Carns, near Tulsk, in Roscommon.† The rich dress and robes worn by the king, for the first and only time, on the day of inauguration, and commonly the horse he rode to the place, with all trappings, became the property of the chief officer or officers who performed the ceremony; but in this respect customs varied in different places.

The oldest record in our ancient writings of the inauguration of a king—probably the oldest reference to Christian inauguration anywhere to be found‡—is given by Adamnan (III. v.) where he mentions the ordination, by St. Columba, of Aedan as king of the Dalriadic Scots, A.D. 574. He calls the ceremony “Ordinatio,” and states that Columba blessed (*benedixit*) the new king as part of the ceremony; but he gives no further details.

Giraldus Cambrensis, in a chapter of his Topography,§ has an account of a disgusting ceremony which he says was observed by the Kinel-Connell at the inauguration of their chiefs:—that at the inauguration meeting, which was attended by the whole people of the territory, a white mare was brought forward, towards which the chief about to be elected *crept all fours—on hands and knees*. Then the animal was killed, its flesh boiled, and a bath made of the broth. Into this the elected chief plunged, and while sitting in it he ate and drank his fill of flesh and broth, helping himself by dipping down his mouth; and what he left, his subjects finished: whereupon he became chief. Here it will be observed that Giraldus reports the

\*Proc. R.I. Acad., 1896–8, p. 55.

†See O'Donovan in FM, A.D. 1225, p. 221, note a.

‡Innes, Critical Essays, II., xlix.

§III., xxv., headed ‘Of a New and Monstrous Way of inaugurating their Kings.’



ceremony of one particular tribe, not the general custom all over Ireland ; and the story is obviously one of the many silly fables which we find in his book—like those of the sorcerers who used to turn stones into red pigs at fairs, of a lion that fell in love with a young woman, and many others of a like kind. Then we must remember that he does not record from personal experience, for he was never in Tirconnell, nor within a hundred miles of it : and the whole story is so absurd that many are convinced it was told to him in a joke by some person who was aware of his unlimited credulity : for no one believes he deliberately invented it. Irish and other writers have left us detailed descriptions of the installation ceremonies, in none of which do we find anything like what Giraldus mentions, and some have directly refuted him. His statement is absolutely unsupported. Harris, the editor of Ware's Works, says (*Antiqq.* 65) :—"The falsity of this filthy fable will best appear by giving a candid relation of the true ceremonies used at the initiation of the kings of Tirconnell" : and he then goes on to detail the ceremony, which agrees with the description given at p. 45, above.

Harris's account, and also those by the native writers, have been corroborated in all leading particulars by a writer whom many will perhaps consider the best authority of all—Edmund Spenser. Spenser knew what he was writing about ; and his description, though brief, is very correct, and agrees, so far as it goes, with the Irish accounts ; while he has not a word about the Tirconnell ceremony described by Giraldus :—" They use to place him, " that shall be their Captain, upon a stone alwayes reserved " for that purpose, and placed commonly upon a hill : In " some of which I have seen formed and ingraven a foot, " which they say was the measure of their first Captain's " foot, whereon hee standing, receives an oath to preserve " all the ancient former customes of the countrey inviolable, " and to deliver up the succession peaceably to his Tanist,



“ and then hath a wand delivered unto him by some whose proper office that is : after which, descending from the stone, he turneth himself round, thrice forward, and thrice backward.”\*

As the tribe elected their king through the votes of their representative men, so they might at any time depose him if he proved unsatisfactory. The O’Kelly, king of Hy Many, was inaugurated by the two families of Clann Diarmada and Hy-Cormaic and by the family of Mithighen or Meehan ; which families had also the function of deposing him “ at the instance [and by the authority of the whole tribe] of Hy Many.” The *Senchus Mór*† mentions the liability of a king to deposition :—“ There are four dignitaries of a territory who may be degraded :—A false-judging king, a stumbling bishop, a fraudulent poet, an unworthy chieftain who does not fulfil his duties.” It is probable that there was a formal ceremony for deposition ; but I do not find it anywhere described.

In case of an interregnum some eminent man—often an ecclesiastic or an ollave—was appointed regent : for which see p. 462, *infra*.

#### 4. Revenue and Authority.

The revenue of the king or ruling chief, of whatever grade, which enabled him to support his court and household was derived from three main sources. *First* : he was allowed for life, or for as long as he continued chief, a tract of land called *Ferann búird*, ‘ land of the *bórd* or table,’

\* Spenser’s View, p. 11. For an exhaustive account by O’Donovan of the inauguration of Irish kings, see his *Hy Fiachrach*, pp. 425 to 432. See also Paper on the Inauguration of Irish Chiefs, by Herbert J. Hore, in *Ulster Journ. Archæol.*, v. 216. In both O’Donovan’s and Hore’s papers Giraldus’s calumny is effectively exposed. Other references and descriptions will be found in Lynch, *Cambr. Ev.*, III. 325 *et seq.* : O’Flaherty, *Ogyg.*, Part 1. : *Kilk. Archæol. Journ.*, 1852–3, p. 335 : Harris’s Ware, *Antiqq.*, II. x. : also FM, A.D. 1315, 1461, 1488, 1589.

† Br. Laws, I. 55.

mensal land, some of which he cultivated by his own bondsmen, and some he let to tenants. *Second* : subsidies of various kinds mentioned in chap. vii., sect. 3, paid him by his free tenant farmers and other free members of the tribe, by the unfree families and tribes, and also by his subject kings or chiefs.\* *Third* : payment for the loan of stock as described at p. 189 farther on. But in addition to all this he might have land as his own personal property : and other minor sources of income will be noticed in next Section.

The king or chief was the military leader in war, the governor in peace ; and he and his people lived in mutual dependence. He was bound to protect the tribesmen from violence and wrong, and they maintained him in due dignity (Br. Laws, II. 345). It was both a danger and a disgrace not to have a chief to look up to : hence the popular saying, " Spend me and defend me." Craftsmen of the various trades, like tenant farmers, had to place themselves under the protection of the chief, and pay tribute—often in kind—*i.e.*, articles made by themselves : which formed an important item in the chief's revenue.

While the inferior chief, of whatever grade, paid tribute (called in Irish *cís* : pron. keece) to his superior, the latter, by a curious custom, was bound to give his dependent a stipend of some kind, called *taurcrec* or *tuarastal* : much smaller, however, than what he received. The tribute paid to the superior—whether by a subordinate chief or by an individual tribesman—consisted mainly of cattle and provisions of various kinds, plough-oxen, hogs, sheep, with mantles and other articles of dress : and it often included such things as dyestuffs, woollen sewing-thread, firewood, wood for carpentry work : and sometimes gold and silver reckoned in ounces. In all cases the quantity or amount, whatever the commodity, was defined by law

\*For various kinds of cess and tribute in the sixteenth century, see article on Ancient Irish Income, Ulst. Journ. Archæol., iv. 241.

and custom. The tributary king made up part of his payments by levying tribute, according to well-defined custom, on his own inferiors.

On the other hand the *taurcrec* given by the superior to his sub-king or chief consisted mainly of such articles as arms, steeds, drinking-horns, brooches, &c. For example, while the king of Dal Riada, in north-east Ulster, gave 300 oxen every year to his superior, the king of Ulaid or Ulster (worth say £5,000 or £6,000 of our money), the latter gave the king of Dal Riada a *tuarastal* of three steeds, three bondmen, three bondwomen, and three [small] ships, all which might now represent £600 or £700.\*

The acceptance of *taurcrec* or *tuarastal*, or stipend, by the inferior was an acknowledgment of submission and allegiance†: a refusal to accept it was equivalent to renouncing, or refusing to acknowledge, allegiance. When Malachi II, came to Brian Boru's tent in 1002 with a retinue of twelve score men to offer him submission, Brian gave him a *taurcrec* of twelve score steeds, which he accepted: but the retinue felt so mortified at their own king's submission that to a man they refused to take charge of them, so Malachi presented them in token of friendship to Brian's son Murrogh.‡ Sometimes—in case of the lower order of dependents—this subsidy was called *raith* [ra] or wages. The tributes and stipends for the various ranks are set forth in detail in the Book of Rights.

The **Book of Rights** “ gives an account of the rights of the monarchs of all Ireland, and the revenues payable to them by the principal kings of the several provinces, and

\* Book of Rights, 155, last two lines, and 169, 10. The special articles given as *cls* or tribute and as *taurcrec*, respectively, may be seen by glancing through this Book of Rights.

† O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, i. 160.

‡ Wars of GG., 133. Another example in O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, i. 62.

of the stipends paid by the monarchs to the inferior kings for their services. It also treats of the rights of each of the provincial kings, and the revenues payable to them from the inferior kings of the districts or tribes subsidiary to them, and of the stipends paid by the superior to the inferior provincial kings for their services. These accounts are authoritatively delivered in verse, each poem being introduced by a prose statement."\*

According to the old authorities, St. Benen or Benignus was the author of the original Book of Rights. The present transcripts of it, which were we know copied from more ancient versions, are not older than the end of the fourteenth century. This, however, refers to the mere penmanship: the language is much older; and it is O'Donovan's opinion that the prose Introductions, which are much less ancient than the text, were written in their present form at a time not far removed from the period of Brian Boru. The Book of Rights has been published, with translation and most valuable Introduction and Notes, by John O'Donovan, LL.D.†

A king usually secured the allegiance of his sub-kings and chiefs by taking hostages from them (*giall*, a hostage); so that every king had hostages residing in his palace: a custom noticed by Adamnan (p. 167). "He is not a king," says the Brehon Law (iv. 51), "who has not hostages in fetters." Notwithstanding the expression used in this quotation—which probably is in a great measure figurative—hostages appear in fact to have been generally treated with consideration. They were seldom kept in fetters; they were permitted to have their own retinue; and were admitted to the court society, so long as they conducted

\* Bk. of Rights, Introd. vi.

† This Introduction was written by O'Donovan himself—as I have the best reason to know—and not by William Elliot Hudson, as someone has erroneously stated (but I cannot lay my hand on the passage). And more than that, it may be asserted that O'Donovan was the only man living at the time (1846–7) who was capable of writing it.



themselves with propriety. But sometimes, either on account of misconduct, or where there was special reason for unfriendly feeling, they were treated with great harshness or cruelty: heavily fettered and closely confined. Except in very few cases they were not permitted to carry arms. Hostages must have been very numerous in every king's palace: for we are told in the *Life of St. Patrick* that in his time Laeghaire, king of Ireland, had in Tara nine hostages from one chief alone, namely, Dicho, prince of Lecale.\*

In every palace there was a special house for lodging hostages. In Tara one of the mounds was called *Dumanan-giall*, the 'Mound of the hostages,' which still remains; and on it stood the hostage house. "King Cormac made a visitation of Ireland thrice, and brought a hostage from every fortress, . . . and to these he gave *Dumha nan giall*"† [with a house on it to reside in]. In the "Feast of *Dun-nan-ged*" we are told that Domnall, king of Ireland, built his palace at *Dun-nan-ged* in imitation of that at Tara, and among other buildings he erected the *Carcair-nan-giall*, the 'prison-house of the hostages.'‡ In a poem in the *Book of Lecan*, describing the building of Aileach, it is stated that "one stone closed the top of the house of the groaning hostages": from which words we may infer that this was a beehive-shaped house, like those pictured and described elsewhere in this book, of which numberless specimens still remain.§ The *Crith Gabhlach*, in describing the residence of a king, speaks of a "moat or trench of servitude" (*drecht gialnai*) for hostages, and states that its length is thirty feet.||

\* On the above points about hostages: see O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, II. 145: Stokes, *Lives of the SS.*, 157, 158: Keating, 456: Sullivan, *Introd.*, 355, note, 614.

† Cuan O'Lochain's words quoted by Petrie, *Tara*, 144.

‡ Moyrath, 7.

§ O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, II. 9: *Ordn. Surv.*, Londonderry, 226.

|| *Br. Laws*, IV. 337.

5. *Privileges.*

A king enjoyed many privileges, and was bound by many restrictions. It will be shown farther on that he was subject to the ordinary law like his free subjects. But if a distress lay against him he was not to be distrained directly: one of his officers, called a "steward-bailiff" (*aithech-fortha*)—a sort of deputy—was to be distrained in his place:—"this is an original steward who always sustains the liability of a king: it is what saves him [the king] from being distrained":\* like the prerogative of the crown in British law, by which the monarch sues and is sued through the attorney-general.

According to the *Senchus Mór* a king's evidence in a brehon's court against all of a rank below him was accepted without question, as they had not the right to be heard in evidence against him: but this privilege did not hold against a bishop, a doctor of learning, or a pilgrim, all of whom were regarded as of equal rank with himself—so far as giving evidence was concerned:—"The king excels all in testimony"—says the *Senchus Mór*—"for he can [by his mere word] decide against every class of persons except those of two orders, namely, of religion and learning, who are of equal rank with himself, as the doctor [*sui*], or the bishop, or the pilgrim."† Whatever was found on a highroad, if the owner was not forthcoming, belonged to the king, except the finder's reward: also a certain proportion of everything cast ashore by the sea; a third of every treasure found within his territory; and one-ninth of the reward paid by the owner to the finder of a thing in a waste place. These rights continued to be enjoyed by the provincial kings down to the fifteenth century.‡

When a king of any grade ascended the throne he usually made a visitation or royal progress through his

\* Br. Laws, II. 121.

† *Ibid.* I. 79.‡ Sullivan, *Introd.*, 240: O'Donovan, *HyM*, 65.

kingdom, to receive allegiance and hostages from his sub-kings ; and this was sometimes repeated during his reign.\* Visitations of this kind were called *saerchhuairt* [saircoort], 'free circuit,' intimating that the king was to be entertained, with all his retinue, free of charge. The king of Ireland, when on free circuit, always brought a numerous escort, or even an army if opposition was anticipated : and he was received by the provincial kings with much state and formality. He always proceeded in the same direction—sunwise (see p. 301, *infra*). Brian Boru, when making his visitation, A.D. 1005, proceeded with an army from his palace of Kincora (at the present town of Killaloe) to Connaught, thence by Assaroe, and all around—"keeping his left hand to the sea"—till he reached Kincora again. In these visitations the Ard-ri proceeded very leisurely : and on his march, each provincial king, and each king of a *mór-tuath*, escorted him in state as far as the residence of the neighbour king.†. A king of any lower grade followed the same course on his visitations, and was received and escorted similarly.

It was the belief of the ancient Irish that when a good and just king ruled—one who faithfully observed in his government the royal customs and wise precepts followed by his ancestors—the whole country was prosperous : the seasons were mild, crops were plentiful, cattle were fruitful, the waters abounded with fish, and the fruit trees had to be propped owing to the weight of their produce. Under bad kings it was all the reverse. In the reign of the plebeian usurping king Carbery Kinncat, "evil was the state of Ireland : fruitless her corn, for there used to be only one grain on the stalk ; fruitless her rivers ; milkless her cattle ; plentiful her fruit, for there used to be but one acorn on the stalk" (FM, A.D. 14). "There are seven proofs which attest the falsehood of every king [*i.e.* seven proofs or testimonies of the king's badness] :—to turn a

\* Br. Laws, iv. 332, note. † *Ibid.* 333 : Book of Rights, 31, 33.

church synod out of their *lis* : to be without truth, without law : defeat in battle : dearth in his reign : dryness of cows : blight of fruit : scarcity of corn. These are the seven live candles that expose the falsehood of every [bad] king.”\* This belief is referred to everywhere in Irish literature (see, for example, *Da Derga*, p. 167) and even found its way into Christianity : in an ancient canon attributed to St. Patrick, among other blessings attending the reign of a just king, are enumerated “ fine weather, calm seas, crops abundant, and trees laden with fruit.”†

The belief in the beneficent influence of a just king prevailed among the Greeks and Romans. Ulysses (in disguise) says to Penelope—speaking of a good king—“ The dark earth bears wheat and barley, and the trees are laden with fruit, and the sheep bring forth without fail, and the sea yields plenty of fish, and all from his wise rule, and the people prosper under him ” (*Odyss.* xix.). Similar testimony might be adduced from Roman writers about their rulers.

The ancient Irish had a very high ideal of what a king should be : and we meet with many statements throughout our literature of the noble qualities expected from him. He should be “ free from falsehood, from the betrayal of his nobles, from unworthy conduct towards his people.”‡ “ For what is a prince selected over a country ? ” asks Carbery of King Cormac, who replies : “ For the goodness of his form and race, and sense, and learning, and dignity, and utterance : he is selected for his goodness and for his wisdom, and strength, and forces, and valour in fighting.”§ A just sovereign “ exercises not falsehood, nor [unnecessary] force, nor oppressive might. He is perfectly recognisant and righteous to his people, both weak and strong.” A king “ must be a man of full lawfulness in all respects : he must be a man that is consulted for knowledge : he must be learned and calm.”||

\*Br. Laws, iv. 53.

† See also Stokes, *Trip. Life*, 507 ; and Dr. Healy, *Irel. Anc. Sch.*, 61, 62.

‡ Br. Laws, iv. 51.

§ *Ibid.* 377.

|| *Ibid.* 335.



A king was also to be hospitable, and keep an open house. "A prince," says Cormac Mac Art, "should light his lamps on Samain day (1st November, the beginning of winter), and welcome his guests with clapping of hands and comfortable seats, and the cup-bearers should be active in distributing meat and drink." A good idea of what was expected in this way from a king is obtained from a statement, in the story of the second battle of Moytura, about King Bres. The people complained bitterly of his churlishness and inhospitality :—"The knives of his people were "not greased at his table, nor did their breath smell of ale, "at the banquet. Neither their poets, nor their bards, "nor their satirists, nor their harpers, nor their pipers, nor "their trumpeters, nor their jugglers, nor their buffoons, "were ever seen engaged in amusing them in the assembly "at his court": so that in the end they rose up, for this and other reasons, and drove him from the throne. The native Gaelic ideal of what a king should be is set forth in several descriptions of individual monarchs, to which references are given below.\* Similar maxims are inculcated in the ecclesiastical legislation of St. Patrick. The duties of a king are fully set forth in one of the Patrician canons,† which, as might be expected, lays great stress on what was to be expected from him in regard to his moral and religious obligations.

A king should have three chief residences. "Every king is a pauper," says the Law, as quoted by Sullivan,‡ "who hath not three chief residences: that is, it is three chief residences each king is entitled to have, *i.e.* three houses or three duns." A similar statement is made in the Law tract, called the "Small Primer" (v. 53, 21, 25); and also in vol. iv. 377, 13; but in this last the translation does

\*O'Curry, *Sick Bed, Atlantis*, I. 387-9: *Dub. Pen. Journ.*, I. 215: *Hyde, Lit. Hist.*, 247-8-9: O'Curry, *MS. Mat.*, 45: *Da Derga*, p. 211.

† Published by Stokes in *Trip. Life*, p. 507: see also Dr. Healy, *Irel. Anc. Sch.*, 61.

‡ *Introd. to O'Curry*, p. 238.

not show it. [See Atkinson's Glossary to Brehon Laws, vol. vi., p. 180, "Conntairisem," a residence; and also v. 441, 25] A king wore a crown or diadem called *mind* or *minn*, for which see vol. II., pp. 251 to 259. Kings had certain heirlooms which descended to their successors. The *roth croi*, or 'royal wheel-brooch,' which the poets insolently demanded from Aed Mac Ainmirech, king of Ireland (A.D. 572-598), was, according to a passage translated by Stokes,\* "a brooch which each king would leave to another." A king's throne was called *ríghshuidhe* [reehee], 'royal seat.'



FIG. 26.

Irish Kings and Archers, thirteenth century. From frescoes in Abbey Knockmoy, Galway. (Dublin Penny Journal, 1832, pp. 228, 229. Drawn by Petrie.)

From the quaint language of a passage in the Brehon Law we may infer that kings made some sort of distribution of duty and amusement according to the days of the week. Thus we find it stated—evidently in view of the king of some particular territory—that on Sunday he indulged in festivity, and exercised lavish hospitality—otherwise he could not be a true king: Monday and Saturday he devoted to the administration of justice: Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday he engaged in sports of various kinds, such as chess, horseracing, coursing: and on Thursday he and his wife devoted themselves to

\* Rev. Celt., xx. 422. Keating (446) tells the whole story of the poets' demand and its punishment: and he says that "each king was wont to leave this brooch as an heirloom and precious relic to his successor."

their children, and to domestic duties in general (Brehon Laws, iv. 335).

### 6. *Limitations and Restrictions.*

Irish Kings were not despotic : they were all, from the supreme monarch down to the king of the *tuath*, in every sense, limited monarchs ; they were subject to law like their own free subjects. We have seen (p. 46, *supra*) that at their inauguration they had to swear that they would govern their people with strict justice, and in accordance with the ancient customs of the kingdom ; and their duties, restrictions, and privileges were strictly laid down in the Brehon code. This idea pervades all our literature, from the earliest time ; of which examples may be seen in the passages referred to at bottom.\*

We shall see at p. 311, farther on, that kings, like many others, were subject to *geasa*—prohibitions from doing certain things. But besides these there were many lines of action forbidden to them, as either dangerous or unbecoming—prohibitions which could hardly be called *geasa* in the usual sense of the word. A king was neither to do any work nor concern himself about servile work of any kind, on penalty of being ranked as a plebeian : or, as the law expresses it, he should not employ himself with “ the handle of a shovel, a spade, or a clod-mallet.”† On a certain occasion Fiachna, the father of the over-king Sweny Menn (A.D. 614 to 627), went out to view his men ploughing : and the annalist who relates the circumstance is careful to add, by way of explanation or apology, “ for Fiachna was not at all a king.”‡ It was not lawful for a king to slaughter and cook an animal—such as an ox—for food.§ It was not permitted to a king or *flaith* (noble)

\* O'Donovan, Moyrath, 121 : Joyce, Short Hist., 201 : Dub. Pen. Journ., i. 102 (Charter of Newry) : Henderson, Fled. Bricrenn, § 5 : Stokes, Trip. Life, 285 : Br. Laws, ii. 121 : O'Grady, Silva Gad., 357 (The lawsuit).

† Br. Laws, iv. 335. ‡ Three Fragm., 17. § Silva Gad., 351. bot.

to keep pigs :\* that is to have them managed for him round or near his house by any of his immediate dependents. But swineherds living in their own homes at a distance from the palace, fed great herds of swine in the woods for the king (Keat. 91 : *Da Derga*, p. 289) : and the king's chief swineherd was held in honour. So the swineherd of Ulysses lived in a fine house on a farm at a distance from the palace (*Odyss.* xiv.). If a king got wounded in the back during battle he was subject to the disabilities of a plebeian.

#### 7. *Household, Retinue, and Court Officers.*

Under the king, of whatever grade, and forming part of his household, persons held various offices of trust, with special duties, all tending to support the dignity or ensure the safety of the king ; just as we find in royal households of modern times. The persons appointed to each office always belonged to some particular family, in whom the office was hereditary ; and all were paid liberal allowances for their services.

The higher the king's status the more numerous were the offices and the more important the positions of the persons holding them. Some of these were in constant attendance, and lived in or about the palace : others attended only on special great occasions : and these commonly lived at a distance in their own territories—for they were themselves generally sub-chiefs, or sub-kings. Most of the higher class of officers, such as professional men (who will be treated of farther on), who were supposed to give their whole—or nearly their whole—time to the service, had land and houses for their support, not far from the royal residence. On state occasions, all these officers attended in person on the monarch, and were assigned their proper places in the great hall. The disposition of the whole company

\* *Br. Laws*, iv. 383.



on such occasions will be found described in the *Crith Gabhlach*,\* and also in Petrie's *Tara* (p. 205 *et seq.*). But in accordance with an ordinance made by king Cormac Mac Art, the Ard-ri, or king of Ireland, was at all times—and not merely on state occasions—to be accompanied by a retinue of at least ten persons :—a *flaith* or noble ; a brehon or judge ; a druid ; a *sai* or doctor ; a poet ; a historian ; a musician ; and three servants—all to exercise their several professional functions when required.† This arrangement continued in force till the death of Brian Boru in 1014, except that in Christian times a bishop took the place of a druid.

A few picked men commonly accompanied the king as personal and immediate guards, and stood beside him when he sat down, with swords or battleaxes in their hands : for Irish kings were not less liable to assassination than others, from ancient times to the present day. Sometimes, as the Law states, there were four such men, one standing in front of the king, one behind, and one on each side. A Brehon Law tract tells us that, in selecting these, the king often gave preference to men whom he had saved from execution or redeemed from slavery ; for such persons would naturally be expected to be faithful from a feeling of gratitude. But he is enjoined not to have among them a man of an opposing party whom he has saved on the battlefield, lest feelings of attachment to a former lord might tempt to treachery.‡ This custom continued down to the sixteenth century : for the Four Masters have left us a description of Shane O'Neill's bodyguard, which has all the antique flavour of the period of the Red Branch Knights. In front of Shane's tent burned a great fire, “ and “ a huge torch, thicker than a man's body, was constantly

\* Br. Laws, iv. 339.

† O'Flaherty, *Ogyg.*, Part III., chap. lxix. : and O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, i. 23.

‡ Br. Laws, iv. 339.

“flaring at a short distance from the fire, and sixty grim  
 “and redoubtable galloglasses, with sharp keen axes,  
 “terrible and ready for action, and sixty stern and terrific  
 “Scots [hired soldiers from Scotland], with massive broad  
 “and heavy-striking swords in their hands [ready] to  
 “strike and parry, were watching and guarding O’Neill.”\*

The king commonly kept in his retinue a *trén-pher* [trainar], a ‘strong man,’ or *cath milid*, ‘battle soldier,’ his champion or chief fighting man, to answer challenges to single combat. Concobar Mac Nessa’s champion Triscatal, who lived in the palace of Emain, is described in an ancient tale in the Book of Leinster in terms that remind us of the English writer’s description of a much later *trén-pher*, John de Courcy, whose very look—on the day of single combat before King John of England and King Philip of France—so frightened the French champion that he “turned round and ranne awaie off the fiede.”† Triscatal was a mighty, broadfronted, shaggy-haired man, with thighs as thick as an ordinary man’s body, wearing a thick leathern apron from his armpits down: his limbs were bare, and his aspect was so fierce that he killed men by his very look.‡ The *trén-pher* of the romances was probably the same as the *aire-echta*, or avenger of insults, described more quietly in the Laws (see p. 92, *infra*).

We know that St. Patrick kept a household in imitation of the ancient Irish custom: and one of his attendants was his *trén-pher* or ‘strong man,’ St. Mac Carthen, afterwards first bishop of Clogher, whose peaceful function was to carry the aged saint on his back across fords and other difficult places, on their missionary journeys.

At the entrance to the royal palace or council chamber stood the doorkeepers (*dórsid*) to scan and interrogate all

\* See FM, A.D. 1557, p. 1555: Joyce, Short Hist., 403.

† This whole story about John de Courcy and the French champion is told in my book “The Wonders of Ireland.”

‡ Hennessy, Mesca, pp. 33-35.

visitors. The nine guardsmen (*cométaiðe*) of Conari the Great, king of Ireland in the first century, stood threateningly at the door of the royal apartment, with shields and ivory-hilted swords; and they allowed no one to enter who did not give a satisfactory account of himself.\*

There was a *Rechtaire* or house-steward, also called *Taisech-teглаig*, i.e. 'chief of the house': sometimes also called *Fer-thaigis*, 'man of the household'—'major-domo,' whose office was a very dignified one. The house-steward of King Conari's household is described in the *Bruden Da Derga* as wearing a fleecy mantle, and holding in his hand his "wand of office," which was no small ornamental rod, but a huge black beam "like a mill-shaft." He arranged the guests in their proper places at table, assigned them their sleeping apartments, and determined each morning the supplies of food for the day. If a dispute arose on any matter connected with the arrangements for receiving, placing, or entertaining the guests, he decided it; and his decision was final. When he stood up to speak all were silent, so that a needle might be heard if it dropped on the floor.† From this description it will be seen that the *rechtaire* corresponded closely with the Anglo-Norman seneschal of later times.

A particular officer had charge of the king's (or queen's) *séds*, 'jewels,' or personal treasures. That the post was considered of importance is shown by the fact that the lady *Erni* who had charge of the caskets and combs and golden ornaments of Maive, queen of Connaught, in the time of the Red Branch Knights, is described as mistress of all the maidens who waited on the queen in the palace of Croghan.‡ The *séds* were generally kept in a *corrþolg*, or large round ornamental satchel, or in a number of such

\* O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, II. 147, 148.

† Stokes's *Da Derga*, 185. Other references to the *rechtaire* in *Trip. Life*, 185, bot. : and in *Moyrath*, 18.

‡ O'Leoney, *Bec Fola*, 187, 189. See also *Oss. Soc.*, IV. 289 and 301.

receptacles. One man, and sometimes two, had charge of the chessboard and chessmen. The board was enclosed in some sort of case, and the men were often kept in a bag of wire netting.\*

There was a *táisech scuir* or master of the horse; who had charge of the king's stables and horses, and there was an *echere* or groom. Three outriders or esquires (*mar-aig* or *ritiri*: 'horsemen' or 'knights') attended king Conari, each of them—even when off duty—holding a whip or scourge (*sraigell*) in his hand, symbolical of office.† We find mentioned, among the other officials, chief swineherds and chief cooks, whose positions were obviously considered of importance.‡ Runners, *i.e.* messengers or couriers, were always kept in the king's or chief's employment: and not unfrequently we find women employed in this office. Finn Mac Cumail had a female runner who figures in the story of Dermot and Grania.

A king kept in his court an ollave of each profession:—poet, historian, storyteller (or most commonly one ollave combining these three professions), physician, brehon, builder, &c. Each of these gave his services to the king, for which an ample stipend was allowed, including a separate dwelling-house and free land. But besides this the professional man had private practice, and the law set forth the exact remuneration for each kind of work.§ The whole institution flourished in the time of Camden, who correctly describes it:—"These lords [*i.e.* the Irish kings and chiefs] have their historians about them, who write their acts and deeds: they have their physicians, their rymers whom they call bards, and their harpers: all of whom have their several livelihoods, and have lands set out for them." Fools, jugglers, and jesters were always kept in the king's court for the amusement of the house-

\* O'Grady, *Silva Gad.*, 133. † O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, II. 146.

‡ O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.* III. 145, 147.

§ See O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, II. 52, 53: see also vol. II., pp. 292 to 294.



hold and guests. They and their functions will be described in chapter xxix. (vol. II. p. 481). Those immediate retainers and officers of the king who lived in or near the palace, and took their meals in their own apartments—a very numerous company—were supplied with food each day from the royal stores.\*

That the above details of the king's household are not fictitious is shown by several statements in Irish authorities setting forth the households of Irish kings and chiefs in comparatively late times, from the eleventh to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, written by persons who described things as they actually saw them, and whose descriptions are still extant. These set forth the various hereditary offices, similar to those stated above, for the older kings, though with differences in detail, as might be expected. For example—the following were the chief officers of the household of O'Kelly, king of Hy Many, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries:—Marshal of the forces, O'Connaill; master of the horse, Hy Fiachrach Finn; door-keeper, Hy Fiachrach Finn; butler, O'hUroin; superintendent of banquets (*i.e. rechtaire*), O'Lomain; king's immediate guard, Clann Indrechtaigh; keeper of cattle, treasures, and chessboard, O'Flahilly; keeper of arms and dresses, Clann Bresail; answerer of challenges to single combat from outside territories, Clann Bresail; avenger of insults, Clann Egan; steward, Aes Brengair; keepers of hounds, the Cruffanns; inaugurators and deponents, Clann Diarmada, Hy Cormaic, and O'Meehan; rearers of horses, Kinel-Aeda; rearers of hounds, the people of Slieve Aughty; carriers of wine from the harbours to the king's residence, Dal Druithne; builders or erectors of edifices, Hy Docomlann; stewards of rents and tributes, the chiefs of the Cantred of Cala.† Each

\* See, for example, Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, 161, top line.

† O'Donovan, HyM, 87. For other similar households see O'Flaherty, *Jar C.*, 139, and 368 to 372.

chief, of whatever grade, kept a household after the manner of a king, but on a smaller scale, with the several offices in charge of the members of certain families. In the *Ulster Journal of Archæology*, III. 117, will be found a valuable paper on "Gaelic Domestics," compiled chiefly from Anglo-Irish sources, in which this custom, as it existed in the sixteenth century, is very fully described.

From the description given at page 43 it will be seen that there was a regular gradation of authority. The king of the *tuath* owed allegiance to the king of the *mór-tuath* : the king of the *mór-tuath* to the provincial king : the provincial king to the *ard-rí* of all Ireland. But this was merely the theoretical arrangement : in the higher grades it was very imperfectly carried out. The authority of the supreme monarch over the provincial kings was in most cases only nominal, like that of the early Bretwaldas over the minor kings of the Heptarchy. He was seldom able to enforce obedience, so that they were often almost or altogether independent of him. There never was a king of Ireland who really ruled the whole country ; the king who came nearest to it was Brian Boru. In like manner the *urrees* or under-kings often defied the authority of their superiors. The people, grouped into families, clans, tribes, and *kinels*, with only slight bonds of union, and with their leaders ever ready to quarrel, were like shifting sand. If the country had been left to work out its own destinies, this loose system would no doubt in the end have developed into one strong central monarchy, as in England and France. As matters stood it was the weak point in the government. It left the country a prey to internal strife, which the supreme king was not strong enough to quell ; and the absence of union rendered it impossible to meet foreign invasion by effectual resistance.

8. *List of Over-Kings.*

According to the ancient bardic legends, five successive colonies arrived in Ireland many centuries before the Christian era :—the Parthalonians, the Nemedians, the Firbolgs, the Dedannans, and the Milesians.\* The bards say that government by monarchy began with the Firbolgs ; whose first king—and the first king of Ireland—was Slainge [two-syll.]. From the time of his accession down to the birth of Christ, they allow 107 monarchs, of whom 9 were Firbolgs ; 9 Dedannans ; and 89 Milesians. The last king of the period before the Christian era was Nuada Necht or Nuada the White : and his successor, Conari the First, or Conari the Great, was the first king belonging to the Christian era. The Milesian kings continued to reign till the time of Roderick O'Conor, the last over-king of Ireland, who died in 1198 (p. 42, *supra*) ; and who, according to the bardic accounts, was the 193rd monarch of Ireland. A full list of the monarchs who reigned from the beginning of the Christian era is given below. A few of those before the Christian era—viz. those that figure most prominently in ancient Irish literature—are also given, with their approximate dates. The dates down to the time of Laegaire (A.D. 428) are given chiefly on the authority of O'Flaherty, who, in his *Ogygia*, has corrected the chronology of the bards and shanachies.

As to the records of the very early kings, they cannot, of course, be received as history : but neither should they be rejected altogether : it is as much of a fault to be too sceptical as to be too credulous. On this subject of the Irish records of the early kings, Dr. Petrie ("Tara," p. 51), who was himself rather over-cautious than otherwise, makes the following judicious observations, quoting the distinguished Scotch historian Pinkerton, who was a determined

\* For an account of all these see Joyce, *Short History of Ireland*, p. 123.

opponent of Ireland's early claims to distinction. Writing of the reign of Tuathal the Legitimate, king of Ireland in the second century, Dr. Petrie observes:—

“It is true, indeed, that the learned and judicious Sir James Ware has rejected, as of no certainty, the whole list of Irish kings anterior to the establishment of Christianity; but this over-cautious rejection will have little weight now, even with the most judicious investigators, and in the opinion of Pinkerton, one of the most sceptical of modern antiquaries ‘was at best rash.’ ‘Mr. O’Conor remarks’—says this writer [Pinkerton]—‘that Tuathal’s reign [A.D. 130–160] forms a new and certain epoch in the progress of Irish history. Foreigners may imagine that it is granting too much to the Irish to allow them lists of kings more ancient than those of any other country in modern Europe: but the singularly compact and remote situation of that island, and its freedom from Roman conquest, and from the concussions of the fall of the Roman empire, may infer this allowance not too much. But all contended for, is the list of kings, so easily preserved by the repetition of the bards at high solemnities; and some grand events of history. For to expect a certain detail, and regular order, in the pagan history of Ireland, were extravagant.’”

So far Pinkerton as quoted by Petrie.

### MONARCHS OF IRELAND BEFORE THE CHRISTIAN ERA.

Heremon, the 19th Monarch, was the first of the Milesian kings, . . .	B.C. 1015
Tigernmas, the 26th king, was the first to smelt gold: he and his successor arranged the colours to be worn by the different classes, . . .	939
Ollamh Fodla [Ollave Fóla], the 40th, founded the triennial <i>féis</i> or convention of Tara, . . . . .	714
Aed Ruadh, } Dithorba, } Cimbaeth, }	reigned in turn immediately before Macha.
Macha Mongruadh, or Macha of the Golden Hair, the 76th monarch, daughter of Aed Ruadh: the only female monarch. She founded the palace of Emain, . . . . .	377
Hugony the Great, the 78th, . . . . .	331
Labrad Loingsech, the 81st, . . . . .	268
Rudruighe, king of Ulster, who became king of Ireland: the 97th, . . . . .	105
Eochaid Feidlech, the 104th, . . . . .	28
Nuada Necht, or Nuada the White, the 107th monarch, . . . . .	1



## KINGS OF IRELAND: CHRISTIAN ERA.

In the early part of this list there is some uncertainty as to the exact dates: but after the time of Colla Huas (327 to 331) the dates may be taken as generally correct. In the latter part of the list 'S.' means Southern Hy Neill; 'N.' Northern Hy Neill; for which, and for "Kings with Opposition," see Joyce, "Short History of Ireland," pp. 134 and 228.

	A.D.		A.D.
Conari I. (the Great) began to reign about the first year of the Christian Era . . . . .	1	Eochaid Muigmedon (Ochy Moyvane) . . . . .	358
Lugaid Riab Derg (Lewy of the Red Circles) . . . . .	65	Crimthann Mór (Criffan More) . . . . .	366
Concobar Abrat Ruad (Conor of the Red Brows) . . . . .	73	Niall of the Nine Hostages . . . . .	379
Crimthann (or Criffan) Nia Náir, son of Lugaid Riab Derg . . . . .	74	Dathi [Dauhi] . . . . .	405
Carbery Cinncat (Cat-head) . . . . .	90	Laeghaire [Leary] . . . . .	428
Feradach Finn Fachtnach . . . . .	95	Olioll Molt, son of Dathi . . . . .	463
Fiatach Finn . . . . .	117	S. Lugaid (or Lewy), son of Laeghaire . . . . .	483
Fiacha Finnola . . . . .	119	N. Murkertach Mac Erca . . . . .	512
Elim Mac Connra . . . . .	126	N. Tuathal Mailgarb . . . . .	533
Tuathal the Legitimate . . . . .	130	S. Diarmaid or Dermot, son of Fergus Kervall . . . . .	544
Mal Mac Rochride . . . . .	160	N. Domnall } joint kings, sons }	565
Fedlimid Rechtmar (Felim the Lawgiver), son of Tuathal the Legitimate . . . . .	164	N. Fergus } of Murkertach }	
Cathair Mór [Cahir More] . . . . .	174	N. Baitan } joint kings . . . . .	566
Conn Cedcathach (the Hundred-fighter) . . . . .	177	N. Eochaid . . . . .	
Conari Moglama (Conari II.) . . . . .	212	N. Ainmire [An'mira] . . . . .	568
Art Aenfer (the Solitary), son of Conn Cedcathach . . . . .	220	N. Baitan . . . . .	571
Lugaid (or Lewy) Mac Con . . . . .	250	N. Aed Mac Ainmirech, or Hugh son of Ainmire . . . . .	572
Fergus Dubhdedach (of the Black Teeth) . . . . .	253	S. Aed Slaine } joint kings . . . . .	598
Cormac Mac Art or Cormac Ul-fada (son of Art the Solitary) . . . . .	254	N. Colman Rimid . . . . .	
Eochaid (or Ochy) Gunnat . . . . .	277	N. Aed (or Hugh) Uaridnach . . . . .	603
Carbery Liffechair (of the Liffey) . . . . .	279	N. Mailcoba . . . . .	611
Fiacha Sraibhtine . . . . .	297	N. Suibne [Sweeny] Menn . . . . .	614
Colla Huas . . . . .	327	N. Domnall or Donall, son of Aed Mac Ainmirech . . . . .	627
Muredach Tirech . . . . .	331	N. Cellach or Kellach } joint }	641
Caelbad . . . . .	357	N. Conall Cail } kings }	
		S. Blathmac } joint kings: sons }	656
		S. Diarmaid } of Aed Slaine }	
		S. Sechnasach, son of Blath-mac . . . . .	664
		S. Cennfaclad [Kenfaila], son of Blathmac . . . . .	671

	A.D.
S. Finachta Fledach (the Fes- tive) . . . . .	674
N. Longsech . . . . .	694
N. Congal . . . . .	704
N. Fergal . . . . .	711
S. Fogartach Mac Neill . . . . .	722
S. Cioneth (or Kenneth), son of Irgalach . . . . .	724
N. Flathbertach or Flahertagh . . . . .	727
N. Aed (or Hugh) Allan, son of King Fergal . . . . .	734
S. Domnall or Donall, son of Murchad . . . . .	743
N. Niall Frassach ( <i>i.e.</i> of the Showers), . . . . .	763
S. Donnchad or Donogh . . . . .	770
N. Aed (or Hugh) Ordnee, son of Niall Frassach . . . . .	797
S. Concobhar or Conor . . . . .	819
N. Niall Caillne . . . . .	833
S. Mailsechlann or Malachi I. . . . .	846
N. Aed (or Hugh) Finnliath . . . . .	863
S. Flann Sinna (of the Shannon) . . . . .	879
N. Niall Glunduff . . . . .	916
S. Donnchad or Donogh . . . . .	919
S. Congalach . . . . .	944

	A.D.
N. Domnall O'Neill, son of Murkertagh of the Leather Cloaks . . . . .	956
S. Mailsechlann or Malachi II. . . . .	980
Brian Boroma, or Boruma, or Boru . . . . .	1002
S. Mailsechlann or Malachi II. (resumes) . . . . .	1014

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*"Kings with Opposition."*

Donnchad or Donogh, son of Brian Born . . . . .	1027
Diarmaid Mac Mail-na-mbo (Dermot Mac Mailnamo), of the race of Cahir More . . . . .	1064
Turlogh O'Brien of the Dalgas . . . . .	1072
Murkertach or Murtoogh O'Brien . . . . .	1086
N. Donall O'Loghlann . . . . .	1086
(Both reckoned as kings of Ireland.)	
Turloch O'Conor . . . . .	1136
N. Murkertagh O'Loghlann . . . . .	1156
Rory or Roderick O'Conor . . . . .	1161



FIG. 27.

Outlines of Ancient Irish Ornamental Carving on a stone monument. See chap. xvi., sect. 4.  
(From Journ. Roy. Soc. Antiqu. Ireland.)

## CHAPTER IV

## WARFARE

SECTION I. *Foreign Conquests and Colonisations.*

FIG. 28.

Capital L from Book of Kells: full size.  
(From Miss Stokes's *Early Christian Art in Ireland*).

LIKE their ancestors the Continental Celts, the Irish, from the earliest ages, had a genius for war and a love of fighting. The Roman geographer Solinus, writing in the third century A.D., says that Irish mothers were wont to present the first food on the point of a sword to their newly-born male infants, as it were to dedicate them to War. There is no mention of this custom in the native records, so that we may safely set down the account as a fable, like some other statements of his about Ireland already noticed at p. 18, *supra*. But the story may be taken as indicating the warlike

character the ancient Irish had earned for themselves

among foreign nations. They were not contented with fighting at home, but made themselves formidable in other lands. Their chief foreign conquests were in Wales and Scotland : but they not unfrequently found their way to the Continent. In those times the Scots, as the Irish were then called, seem to have been almost as much dreaded as the Norsemen were in later ages. Irish literature of every kind abounds in records of foreign invasions and alliances ; and it will be seen that the native accounts are corroborated by Roman writers, so far as they touch on these matters.\*

In the bardic legends there is an account of an expedition " beyond the sea "—probably to Britain—in the first century, by *Crimthann Nia Náir* [Criffan-nee-nawr], king of Ireland (A.D. 74 to 90), and of his return with much treasure to his palace of Dun-Criffan on Ben-Edar or Howth (FM, A.D. 9). At a still earlier time the old shanachies celebrate the foreign expeditions of two other kings—Aengus Ollmucad and Hugony the Great.†

All who have read the histories of England and Rome know how prominently the " Picts and Scots " figure during the first four centuries of our era, and how much trouble they gave to both Romans and Britons. The Picts were the people of Scotland : the Scots were the Irish Gaels :—" The Scots, who afterwards settled in what is now known as Scotland, at that time dwelt in Ireland."‡ The invasions of the Picts and Scots are celebrated by many ancient writers, among others by Gildas in his History. As a protection against these two tribes the Romans, at different intervals in the second and third centuries, built those great walls or ramparts from sea to sea between Britain and Alban, so well known in the history of those times, of which

\* For a good abstract of Irish foreign expeditions and conquests, see Sullivan's Introd. to O'Curry, Lect., pp. 22 to 48.

† O'Flaherty, *Ogyg.*, III. xxvi. and xxxviii.

‡ Gardiner's *Students' Hist. of Engl.*, 1892, pp. 23, 24.



there are still considerable remains. For three or four centuries the Irish continued their incursions to Britain and Scotland, sometimes fighting as invaders against the Picts, sometimes combining with them against the Romans and Britons : and as a consequence there were several settlements of colonies from Ireland in Wales and Scotland. An ancient Irish historical tale entitled " The Banishment of the Desii " gives an account of one of these migrations. It is a well-known historical fact, noticed in the Irish annals of those times, that a numerous and powerful tribe called the Desii, who dwelt near Tara, were expelled for a breach of law from their district (which retains the name of Deece to this day) by Cormac Mac Art in the third century (see pages 92, 93, below). Part of these went to Munster and settled in a territory which still retains their name—the two baronies of Decies in the Co. Waterford. Another part, crossing over to Wales under a leader named Eochaid [Ochy], settled down in a district called Dyfed, and preserved their individuality as an immigrant tribe for many generations. This migration and settlement is related in detail in one of the Irish historical stories—a relation that receives so much collateral and incidental confirmation from Welsh records totally independent of the Irish authorities, that we cannot doubt its substantial accuracy.

The account of the conquests of the Irish in West Britain given in Cormac's Glossary (written in the ninth or tenth century from older authorities) may be regarded as generally reliable : for it is corroborated by other records and indications from independent sources. In this Glossary we are told a story about a lapdog which was " brought from the east from Britain " by Carbery Musc, a well-known historical Irish personage, from whom certain districts in Ireland, still called Muscraidhe or Muskerry, took their name. He was the son of Conari II., king of Ireland from A.D. 212 to 220 : and was brother of that Reuda mentioned by Bede as the leader of a colony from Ireland to

Scotland (see p. 82, *infra*). Cormac's Glossary (p. III) says:—"For when great was the power of the Gael in Britain, they divided Alban between them into districts, and each knew the residence of his friend, and not less did the Gael dwell on the east side of the sea than in Scotia (Ireland), and their habitations and royal forts were built there. Whence is named *Dinn Tradui*, i.e. the triple-fossed fort of Crimthann [Criffan] the Great (son of Fidach), king of Ireland and of Alban to the Ictian Sea (the English Channel), and hence also is *Glasimpere* or Glastonbury of the Gael, i.e. a church on the border of the Ictian Sea. . . . Thus every [Irish] tribe divided [the land] on that side ; for its [i.e. the tribe's] property on that side was equal [to that on the west] ; and they continued in this power till long after the coming of Patrick. Hence Cairbre Musc was visiting his family and friends in the east " [when the episode of the lapdog occurred]. This Criffan the Great, "king of Ireland and of Alban to the Ictian Sea," who is to be distinguished from the Criffan mentioned at p. 33, reigned in Ireland from A.D. 366 to 379 : he is celebrated for his conquests in Britain, not only in Cormac's Glossary as quoted above, but in all the Irish histories and traditions dealing with that time. His reign is almost exactly coincident with the command of the Roman general Theodosius (father of the emperor Theodosius the Great), who, according to the Roman historians, checked the career of the Gaels and their allies. The Irish accounts of Criffan's invasion of Britain are in the main corroborated by the Roman poet Claudian, in those passages of his poem that celebrate the victories of Theodosius. While Criffan and his allies the Picts were vigorously pushing their conquests in Britain, the Saxons, who were at this time beginning their inroads, made themselves equally formidable. The continual attacks of the three tribes became at last so intolerable that the Roman government was forced to take defensive measures. In 367, the year after

Criffan's accession, Theodosius was appointed to the military command of Britain, and, after two active campaigns, he succeeded in delivering Britain for the time from the invaders. The following short passage, translated from Claudian's poem, pictures vividly the triumph achieved by Theodosius over the three hostile tribes :—" The Orcades flowed with Saxon gore ; Thule became warm with the blood of the Picts ; and icy Ierne (*i.e.* Ireland) wept for her heaps of [slaughtered] Scots." In another passage of the same poem Claudian boasts that Theodosius chased the Irish from the British shores and pursued them out to sea.\* Though all this no doubt is in the main true history, we must make some allowance for the poet's natural tendency to exaggeration in his laudatory record of the great Roman general's exploits.

Criffan was succeeded as king of Ireland by Niall of the Nine Hostages (A.D. 379 to 405), who was still more distinguished for foreign conquests than his predecessor. Moore (*Hist.* i. 150) thus speaks of his incursions into Wales :—" An invasion of Britain, on a far more extensive and formidable scale than had yet been attempted from Ireland, took place towards the close of the fourth century under Niall of the Nine Hostages, one of the most gallant of all the princes of the Milesian race." Observing that the Romans had retired to the eastern shore of Britain, Niall collected a great fleet, and, landing in Wales, carried off immense plunder. He was forced to retreat by the valiant Roman general Stilicho, but " left marks of depredation and ruin wherever he passed." On this occasion Claudian, when praising Stilicho, says of him—speaking in the person of Britannia :—" By him was I protected when the Scot [*i.e.* Niall] moved all Ireland against me, and the ocean foamed with their hostile oars."

Niall's invasion is mentioned by several Irish authorities, as, for instance, an ancient Latin Life of St. Patrick,

\* See O'Flaherty, *Ogyg.*, part III., chaps. xxxiv., xxxvii., lxxxv., lxxxvii., and lxxxviii.

from which the following extract is quoted by Ussher in his *Primordia*, p. 587 :—"The Scoti of Hibernia, under their king Niall of the Nine Hostages, devastated several of the Roman provinces of Britain during the reign of Constantius, the son of Constantine. They began their incursions on the north of Britain, from which, after a time, by their armies and fleets, they expelled the inhabitants and took possession of the country."\* This old writer, however, is in error as to the time of Niall's invasion. Constantius had, indeed, as we know from other sources, to proceed against the Picts and Scots; but he died in 361; and Niall's expedition did not take place in his reign, but in that of Theodosius the Great. The extensive scale of these terrible raids is strikingly indicated by no less an authority than St. Patrick, who, in his "Confession," speaking of the expedition—probably led by Niall—in which he himself was captured, says :—"I was then about sixteen years of age, being ignorant of the true God; I was brought captive into Ireland, *with so many thousand men*, according as we had deserved."†

The Irish narratives of Niall's life and actions add that he invaded Gaul, which was his last exploit; for he was assassinated (A.D. 405) on the shore of the river Loire by one of his own chiefs, the king of Leinster, who shot him dead with an arrow. The Irish legendary account of the origin of Niall's cognomen runs parallel with the history of his foreign conquests. O'Clery gives it in his Glossary from some old authority :—"because he took hostages from the five provinces of Ireland; and also French, Saxon, British, and Alban hostages."‡

Welsh scholars, from Lhuyd of two centuries ago, to Principal Rhys of the present day,§ as well as historical

\* O'Donovan, HyF, 318, and note p: Petrie's Tara, 93.

† Trip. Life, 357. ‡ Rev. Celt., v. 2, 3: also Otia Mers. II. 90.

§ See Rhys's valuable article, The Early Irish Conquests of Wales and Dumnonia, in Proc. Roy. Soc. Antiqq. of Irel. for 1890-91, p. 642. See



inquirers of other nationalities, have investigated this question of the Irish conquests in Wales, quite independently of Irish records: and they have come to the conclusion that, at some early time, extensive districts of Wales were occupied by the Irish; that is to say, Goidels or Gaels direct from Ireland, as distinct from an earlier and far more extensive occupation by Goidels from continental Gaul. As a consequence of the later occupation by Irish Gaels, numerous places in Wales have to this day names commemorating the invaders: as, for instance, the Welsh name of Holyhead, *Cerrig y Gwyddell*, the 'Rocks of the Goidels or Gaels'; and the Welsh language contains many Irish words, or words evidently derived from Irish. There are still in Anglesey, says Dr. Jones, in his book on this subject,\* "oval and circular trenches which we see in great plenty . . . called *Cyttie r' Gwyddelod*, 'the Irishmen's cottages.' " These, of course, are what we know in Ireland as *lisses* or *raths*, which the Irish built up in their newly-adopted country according to the fashion of their own. After careful examination of all the evidence, Dr. Jones comes to the conclusion that the Gaels from Ireland once occupied the whole of Anglesey, Carnarvon, Merioneth, and Cardiganshire, and parts of Denbighshire, Montgomery, and Radnor. Still another trace of the footsteps of the Irish Gael in Britain is the existence of a number of Oghams in Wales; for, so far as we know, Ogham was peculiar to the Irish.† But besides all this,

also Stokes, *On the Linguistic Value of the Irish Annals*, p. 25; O'Donovan, *HyF*, 318; and Todd, *St. Patrick*, 352, note 1.

\* *Vestiges of the Gael in Gwynedd (North Wales)*, 1851, by Dr. Jones, Bishop of St. David's, in which this whole question is fully discussed. In the *Revue Celtique*, xvii. 102, Principal John Rhys gives a long list of Welsh words borrowed from Irish. It is to be observed that the Britons often made reprisals by incursions into Ireland, as we see in the case of Coroticus (*Lanigan, Eccl. Hist.*, i. 296). See also on this "Bretons Insulaires en Irlande," by J. Loth, in *Revue Celtique*, xviii. 304, in which M. Loth gives many examples of British plundering incursions to Ireland.

† See Hyde, *Lit. Hist.*, 109.

ancient Welsh literature—history, annals, tales, legends—like that of Ireland, abounds in references to invasions of Wales and other parts of Britain by Irishmen.

The continual intimate relationship by intermarriage between the Irish kings and chiefs on the one side, and the ruling families of western and northern Britain on the other, are fully set forth in a series of valuable genealogical articles by the Rev. John Francis Shearman in the *Kilkenny Archæological Journal* for 1879 to 1884 : which are reprinted in his “*Loca Patriciana*.”

We have seen the record in Cormac’s Glossary (p. 75. *supra*) that the Irish retained their sway in Britain long after the arrival of St. Patrick (in 432). Of this there is a curious incidental corroboration in a passage in the story of the Boroma. When Branduff, the powerful king of Leinster, in the end of the sixth century, heard that prince Cummuscach was coming to Leinster on “a youthful free circuit”—about A.D. 597—he did not wish to receive him personally, knowing his licentious character. “Let a messenger,” said he, “be sent to them [prince and retinue], and let them be told that I have gone into Britain (*i m-Bretnaib*) to levy rent and tribute.”\*

About the period of the series of expeditions to Wales, the Irish also mastered the Isle of Man : and Irish literature abounds with references to the constant intercourse kept up by the parent people with those of their little insular colony. Though the Norsemen wrested the sovereignty of the island from them in the ninth century, they did not succeed in displacing either the Gaelic people or their language. The best possible proof of the Irish colonisation and complete and continued occupation of the island is the fact that the Manx language is merely a dialect of Irish, spelled phonetically, but otherwise very little altered. There are also still to be seen, all over the island, Irish buildings and monuments, mixed up, however,

\* O’Grady, *Silva Gad.*, 408,

with many of Norse origin : and the great majority of both the place names and the native family names are Gaelic.\*

It is curious that the idea of having a sort of claim to the Isle of Man still lingered among the Irish at the end of the eleventh century, when the Danes held it : for the annalist Tigernach records an expedition to the island from Leinster in 1060, which occurred during his own lifetime : a record also given by the Four Masters, as well as by other annalists. Tigernach's words are :—[A.D. 1060] " Murchad, king of Leinster, son of [king] Dermait Mac Mailnamo, invaded Mann and took tribute out of it, and defeated Ragnall's son " [the Danish ruler].†

Niall's successor Dathi [Dauhy], king of Ireland, A.D. 405 to 428, followed in the footsteps of his predecessors, and according to Irish authorities invaded Gaul : but was killed by a flash of lightning at the foot of the Alps, after his followers had destroyed the hermitage of a recluse named Formenius or Parmenius. Although this legend looks wild and improbable, it is in some respects corroborated by continental authorities, and by present existing names of places at the head of Lake Zurich : so that there is very likely some foundation for the story.‡

The record of the death of Laegaire, Dathi's successor, and king of Ireland when St. Patrick arrived, which is mainly historical, though somewhat mixed with legend, tends to confirm the preceding accounts of the foreign expeditions of the Irish kings. It had been prophesied for this king by some old druid that he was destined to be killed *between Erin and Alban* ; and accordingly, in order to circumvent the prophecy, he remained at home, and never attempted to imitate the foreign expeditions of his predecessors. But on one occasion he invaded Leinster

\* See Lynch, *Cambr. Ev.*, 1. 159.

† *Rev. Celt.*, xvii. 402.

‡ Ferguson, *Legend of Dathi*, *Proc. R. I. Acad.*, Feb. 1882, p. 167.

in violation of a solemn oath sworn by the elements : whereupon, says the legend, he was killed by the sun and wind, at the side of a little river named Cass, at a marshy spot situated between two hills named *Erin* and *Alban* : so that the prophecy was fulfilled.

We will now go back in point of time to sketch the Irish colonisation of north Britain, the accounts of which, however, are a good deal mixed with those of the Welsh settlements. From very early ages, the Irish of Ulster were in the habit of crossing the narrow sea to Alban or Scotland, where colonies were settled from time to time : and constant intercourse was kept up between the two countries down to a late period. The authentic history of these expeditions and settlements begins in the early part of the third century, during the reign of Conari II. (A.D. 212-220). This king had three sons, Carbery Musc (who has been already mentioned in connection with Wales, p. 74), Carbery Baskin, and Carbery Riada. At this time a great famine devastated Munster ; and Carbery Riada led a number of his people to the north of Ireland and to the south-west of Scotland, in both which places they settled down permanently. A brief statement of this migration, and of its cause, is given in *Lebar Brecc* : part of the Irish text may be seen in Stokes's *Lives of SS.*\* The following is a translation of that portion of the passage immediately bearing on our subject :—" Dal-Riata " and the Fir Alban [men of Scotland]. They are both of the " seed of Coirpre Rigfota [*i.e.* Carbery Riada], son of Conaire " son of Mog of Munster. Great famine came on Munster, " so that the seed of Coirpre Rigfota departed from it, and " one division of them reached Scotland, while the other " division remained in Erin [in the present county Antrim] : " whence the Dal Riata [of both Scotland and Ireland] to " this day. They afterwards increased and multiplied in " these [two] districts, till the time of Aedan Mac Gabrain,

\* *Lebar Brecc*, 238*d*, 2nd col., line 15 ; *Lives of SS.*, Pref. cxiv, note 1.



"king of Alban (Scotland), and of Aed Mac Ainmirech, "king of Ireland." The Lebar Brecc then goes on to give an account of the dispute between these two kings, which was subsequently settled at Drumketta.\* Adamnan more than once mentions both Aedan and Aed Mac Ainmirech, as well as the Convention at Drumketta, and so far corroborates the accounts in the native Irish authorities.†

These Irish narratives are confirmed by the Venerable Bede in his Ecclesiastical History (I. i.), where he says :—"In course of time, besides the Britons and Picts, Britain "received a third nation, the Scots, who, migrating from "Ireland under their leader Reuda, obtained for themselves "either by friendly agreement or by force of arms, those "settlements among the Picts which they still hold. From "the name of their commander they are to this day called "Dalreudini : for in their tongue *dál* signifies a part." The "Dalreudini" of Bede is the Dalriada of Irish history. He correctly interprets *dál* : for *Dál-Riada* signifies Riada's or Reuda's portion : and the word *dál* or *dáil* is in use at the present day. These primitive settlers increased and multiplied, as the Lebar Brecc says ; and, supported from time to time by contingents from the mother country, they held their ground against the Picts. But the settlement was weak and struggling till the reign of Lewy, king of Ireland (A.D. 483 to 512), about three centuries after the time of Carbery Riada. In the year 503 three brothers named Fergus, Angus, and Lorne, sons of a chief named Erc, a direct descendant of Carbery Riada, led a colony to Scotland from their own district in the Irish Dalriada : descendants of the Munster settlers of three centuries before. They appear to have met with little or no opposition, and being joined by the previous settlers,

\* For the Convention at Druim-Cete or Drumketta, and for this celebrated dispute and its settlement, see Joyce, Short Hist. of Irel., 151.

† See also Ogy., III. lxiii. For the genealogy of Carbery, see Keating, 692-3.

they took possession of a large territory, of which Fergus, commonly called Fergus Mac Erc, and also known as Fergus More (the Great), was the first king. The descendants of these colonists ultimately mastered the whole country, and from them its name was changed from Alban to Scotia or Scotland. Fergus was the ancestor of the subsequent kings of Scotland; and from him, in one of their lines of genealogy, descend, through the Stuarts, our present royal family. The memory of these three princes is deeply graven on the history of Scotland; and many Scottish persons and places have been named from them, of which examples will occur to anyone moderately acquainted with the history and topography of Scotland.

## 2. *Military Ranks, Orders, and Services.*

At different periods of our early history the kings had in their service bodies of militia, who underwent a yearly course of training, and who were at call like a standing army whenever the monarch required them. The most celebrated of these were the "Red Branch Knights" of about the time of the Incarnation, and the "*Fianna* or *Fena* of Erin," who flourished in the third century. Though the accounts that have come down to us of these two military organisations are much mixed up with romance and fable, there is sufficient evidence, both literary and material, to show that they really existed and exercised great influence in their day.

The **Red Branch Knights** belonged wholly to Ulster, and in the ancient Tales they are represented as in the service of Concobar Mac Nessa, king of that province, but not king of Ireland. The king's palace was Emain, or Emania near Armagh, of which a description will be found in vol. II. p. 89.

Every year during the summer months, various companies of the Knights came to Emain under their several

commanders, to be drilled and trained in military science and feats of arms. The greatest Red Branch commander was Cuculainn, a demigod, the mightiest of the heroes of Irish romance. The other chief heroes were Conall Kernach ; Laegaire (or Laery) the Victorious ; Keltar of the Battles ; Fergus Mac Roy ; the poet Bricriu Nemthenga (‘ Venom tongue ’), who lived at Loughbrickland, where his fort still remains near the little lake ; and the three sons of Usna—Naisi, Ainnle, and Ardan.

The Red Branch Knights had a passion for building great duns or forts, many of which remain to this day, and excite the wonder and awe of visitors. Besides Emain



FIG. 29.

Dundalgan, Cuculainn's stronghold and residence, as it appeared, and as it was drawn, in 1758, by Thomas Wright, from whose book '*Louthiana*,' it has been copied. Height of mound about 50 feet. The forts and ramparts are now covered with trees, and there is a modern house on top : so that it is hard to obtain a view of the general shape.

itself, there is the majestic fort of Dun-Dalgan, Cuculainn's residence, a mile west of the present town of Dundalk. This dun consists of a high mound surrounded by an earthen rampart and trench, all of immense size, even in their ruined state ; but it has lost its old name, and is now called the moat of Castletown, while the original name Dundalgan, slightly altered, has been transferred to Dundalk. Another of these Red Branch Knights' residences stands beside Downpatrick : viz, the great fort anciently called (among other names) Dun-Keltair, or Rath-Keltair,



FIG. 30.

Rath-Keltair at Downpatrick. From Col. Wood-Martin's Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland, I., 318.



or Aras-Keltair, where lived the hero, Keltar of the Battles. It consists of a huge embankment of earth, nearly circular, with the usual deep trench outside it, covering a space of about ten acres. Still another, which figures much in the old romances under its ancient name *Dun-da-benn*—but now called Mountsandall—crowns the high bank over the Cutts waterfall on the Bann, near Coleraine. Four miles west of this is a similar fortress, now known by the name of the “Giant’s Sconce,” which is the ancient *Dun-Cethern* [Doon-Kehern], so called from “Cethern of the Brilliant Deeds,” a famous Red Branch Knight.\* John De Courcy’s original Castle of Dundrum, in Down, was built on the site of one of the most formidable of all—Dun-Rury, the immense earthworks of which still remain round the present castle, at the base of the rock, though the original dun-mound on the top was levelled by the castle-builders.

Contemporary with the Red Branch Knights were the **Degads**† of Munster—but of Ulster extraction—whose chief was Curoi Mac Dáirċ, king of South Munster; and the **Gamanradii** (Ir. *gamhanraide*) of Connaught, commanded by Keth Mac Magach and by the renowned hero Ferdiad. Curoi Mac Dáirċ lived in a *caher* or stone fort on a rocky shelf 2050 feet over the sea, on the mountain of Caherconree, near Tralee, whose ruins have been lately, and for the first time, described correctly and in detail by Mr. P. J. Lynch.‡ As a still further evidence that the old legends and romances about Curoi rest on a foundation of fact, not only is the old stone fortress there to witness, but, like *Emain* and *Craebh-Ruadh* in the north, it retains its ancient name, which has been extended to the whole mountain, and which commemorates the mighty hero himself: for “Caherconree” correctly represents the sound of the

\* On the forts of Dun-Cethern and Dun-da-benn, see Reeves, *Adamnan*, 94, note *i*.

† Degads: see O’Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, i., pp. 9 and 358.

‡ In *Proc. R. Soc. Antiqq., Irel.*, 1899, p. 5.

Irish name *Cathair-Chonroi*, the caher or stone fortress of Curoi (nom. *Curoi*, gen. *Conroi*).

The Red Branch Knights, as well as those of Munster and Connaught, used chariots both in battle and in private life. Chariot-racing too was one of their favourite amusements: and the great heroes are constantly described in the tales as fighting from their chariots.

The **Fianna** or **Fena of Erin**,\* so far as we can trace their history with any certainty, lasted for about a century, viz. from the reign of Conn the Hundred-fighter (A.D. 177-212) to that of Carbery of the Liffey (279-297). They attained their greatest power in the reign of Cormac Mac Art (254-277) under their most renowned commander Finn, the son of Cumal, or Finn Mac Coole as he is commonly called, king Cormac's son-in-law, who is recorded in the Annals to have been killed beside the Boyne, when an old man (A.D. 283). Their ordinary strength in time of peace was three *catha* [caha] or battalions, each *cath* [cah] 3000: 9000 in all: but in war they were brought up to seven *catha* or 21,000. Before admission to the ranks, candidates were subjected to certain severe tests, both physical and mental, which may be seen in Keating, page 349. One of these tests is worthy of special mention here. No candidate was allowed to join unless he had mastered a certain specified and large amount of poetry and tales: that is to say, he had to prove that he was a well-educated man, according to the standard of the times: a provision that anticipated by seventeen centuries the condition of admission to the higher posts of our present military service, designed to ensure that every commissioned officer of the army shall be a man of good general education. This—whether history or legend—shows what was regarded as the general standard of education in Ireland in those times. The Fena

\* This word *Fianna* [Feena], though commonly restricted to the "Fianna of Erin," is a generic term, meaning 'champions, soldiers, warriors.' In the *Da Derga* (p. 169) it is applied to the Red Branch Knights.

of Erin, and Finn himself, are frequently mentioned in our earliest writings, among others in Cormac's Glossary.

Of all the heroes of ancient Ireland Finn is most vividly remembered in popular tradition. Pinkerton, the Scotch historian, who was anything but favourable to Ireland's claims to early civilisation or importance, thus speaks of him :—" He seems to have been a man of great talents for " the age, and of celebrity in arms. His formation of a regular standing army, trained to war, in which all the Irish " accounts agree, seems to have been a rude imitation of " the Roman legions in Britain. The idea, though simple " enough, shows prudence, for such a force alone could " have coped with the Romans, had they invaded Ireland."\* Finn had his chief residence on the summit of the Hill of Allen, a remarkable flat-topped hill, lying about four miles to the right of the railway as you pass Newbridge and approach Kildare, rendered more conspicuous of late years by a tall pillar erected on the top, on the very site of Finn's house. Its ancient name was *Almu*, gen. *Alman*, dat. *Almain*, which is pretty correctly represented in sound by the present name Allen. "*Almu*"—says the old tale of the 'Cause of the Battle of Cnucha' in the Book of the Dun Cow—" was Finn's principal residence while he lived."† The house was not, however, built by Finn, but by his maternal ancestor Nuada, king Cahirmore's chief druid. So far as we can judge from the accounts of its construction given in the above-named tale, it was built altogether of wood—like the "*Red Branch*"—without any earthen rampart round it: and accordingly no trace of a rampart or earthen dun remains. At this day the whole neighbourhood round the hill teems with living traditions of Finn and the Fena.

When not employed in training or fighting, the Fena spent the six months of summer—from 1st of May to the

\* Pinkerton: Inquiry, Hist. Scotl., II. 77.

† Rev. Celt., II. 93. On "*Almu*" see vol. II. pp. 63 and 94, note.

31st of October—hunting, and lived on the produce of the chase, camping out all the time : during the remaining six months they were billeted on the well-to-do people all over the country—fed and lodged free. But they were at all times—summer and winter—liable to be re-embodied at a central station by the king when he found it necessary to wage war. They were divided into distinct tribes or clans, belonging to the several provinces, each under its own commander. Of these, the Clann Baskin of Leinster, under the immediate command of Finn, and the Clann Morna of Connaught, commanded by Goll Mac Morna, were rival tribes ; and ever since the time when Goll slew Finn's father Cumal in the battle of Cnucha, now Castleknock, near Dublin, regarded each other with hatred and distrust.

Those Fena and their leaders, though supposed to be in the service of the monarch, were very uncertain in their allegiance : sometimes they fought on his side : sometimes against him. After king Cormac's death they became openly rebellious, and attempted to impose a military despotism on the country, claiming in some respects to rule even the monarch of Ireland. At last the king—Carbery of the Liffey, Cormac Mac Art's son, who came to the throne A.D. 279—marched against them, and annihilated them in the bloody battle of Gavra, near Skreen in Meath (A.D. 297) : but was himself slain in the battle.

We have seen that the Red Branch Knights, and their contemporary heroes of Munster and Connaught, fought, rode, and raced in chariots ; and that they erected immense duns or forts. In both these respects the Fena of Erin stand in complete contrast. In none of the tales or other literature of the Fena is it mentioned that they used chariots in battle, and they scarcely ever used them in any way. Their rejection of chariots as a feature of their organisation must have been by deliberate choice : for, as will be shown in chap. xxviii. (vol. II. 401). chariots were



used all over Ireland, both in civil and military life, not only before and after the time of the Fena, but during the whole period of their existence. For instance, they figure in the battle of Crinna, A.D. 254, at the very time when the Fena were in all their glory. Moreover, there is evidence to show that the Fena knew the use of chariots, though they did not adopt them.\* Then as to duns: while we have still remaining the majestic ruins of many of the forts erected by the Red Branch Knights, as shown at page 84, there are, so far as I can find out, no corresponding forts in any part of Ireland attributed to the Fena in the ancient tales. Even on the Hill of Allen, where if anywhere we might expect to find a mighty fortification like that at Downpatrick, there is no vestige of a rath. Finn had another residence in Magh Ele, now Moyally or Moyelly, near Clara in King's County, where there are vivid traditions about him; and a cave is still pointed out which the people say belonged to him. But there is no dun or rath in the place, and no tradition that such a fort ever existed there. No forts, large or small, that I know of, commemorate any others of the great leaders—Ossian, Oscar, Dermot O'Dyna, Goll Mac Morna, Cailte Mac Ronain, or Conan Mail, such as we have for Cuculainn, Keltar of the Battles, Cethern of the Brilliant Deeds, Curoi Mac Dáire, and others.

Why the Fena neither used chariots nor built great forts appears, however, to be sufficiently explained by their organisation, and by the sort of life they led. They rejected chariots because they were organised purely as an infantry force, and an infantry force they remained to the last. For the same reason they made little use of horses, except in racing, though on long journeys their leaders sometimes travelled on horseback. One of the main objects of their lives was to perfect their activity, strength, and health, by physical training: and accordingly

\* O'Grady, *Silva Gad.*, 107, 29.

they constantly practised athletic exercises on foot—running, leaping, wrestling, and hunting. Then they built no enduring forts, for they did not need them, inasmuch as they always—when not on campaign—hunted and camped out during the six months of summer, constantly changing their residence: while during the winter half-year they were billeted in the houses of the chiefs and farmers. Yet we know that during all this time, kings and chiefs who needed permanent homesteads continued to build raths, lisses, and duns for their residences all through Ireland.

**Ordinary War Service** was of several kinds. Every man who held land in any sort of tenancy was obliged to bear a part in the wars of the tribe and in the defence of their common territory: or, as the law expresses it, every land occupier owed to the chief “service of attack and defence.”\* The number of days in the year that each should serve was strictly defined by law: and when the time was ended, he might return to his home—unless some very special need arose. A chief or king, if required, was bound to send a certain number of men, fully armed, for a fixed time periodically, to serve his superior in war. The men of the superior king’s own immediate territory, with the contingents supplied to him from the several subordinate tribes by their chiefs, went to form his army. The tributary chief again made up the contingent to be sent to his superior, partly from his own household troops, and partly by small contingents from his sub-chiefs.

These were the usual conditions. But sometimes tribes had certain privileges, commonly conceded as a reward for special services in the past. For example, the *Oirghialla* [Ore-yeela] or the people of the kingdom of Oriell, in Ulster, were one of these favoured tribes. They were bound to send 700 men to attend the king of Ireland in his hosting for “three fortnights” every third year: but they were not

\* Br. Laws, III. 23.

to be called upon in spring or autumn, when the men had to attend to their crops. Moreover, the monarch was bound to pay each man of them who attended him during the hosting or campaign a *séd* or cow, or the equivalent value, and had to make compensation to the tribe to the value of twenty-one cows for every man of them lost during the war :\* whereas in case of other tribes, neither pay for service nor compensation for death was due.

The king had in his service a champion or chief fighting man, called *Airē-echta*—always a *flaith* or noble (for nobles see p. 156, below)—whose duty it was to avenge all insults or offences offered to the families of the king and tribe, particularly murder : like the “ Avenger of blood ” of the Jews and other ancient nations. In any expected danger from without he had to keep watch at the most dangerous ford or pass—called *berna baoghaill* [barna beel] or “ gap of danger ”—on that part of the border where invasion was expected, and prevent the entrance of any enemy.† He had five men-at-arms to attend on him constantly, and he enjoyed several valuable privileges ; but a large number was at his command when he needed them for the discharge of his dangerous duties. It would appear that each tribe had a special Aire-echta, who was in the immediate service of the chief or king. King Cormac Mac Art’s son once insulted a woman belonging to the Déise or Desii of Meath : whereupon Aengus of the Terrible Spear, the Aire-echta of the tribe, made his way to Tara, and seizing a spear from a rack, he killed the prince with one thrust of it in open court in revenge for the insult. In the resulting scuffle the king’s eye was destroyed by the handle of the

\* On all these points, see Book of Rights, 135 and 139.

† See Br. Laws, iv. 323 ; O’Curry, Man. & Cust., i. 365 ; and O’Donovan, HyF, 211. In some old documents the name *aire-echta* is derived from *echt*, murder : so that *Aire-echta* means ‘ Chief of [the avenging of] murder.’ (See Windisch, Wörterbuch, Ir. Texte, i., ‘ Echt ’) : elsewhere *echt* is given as meaning ‘ a deed ’ : *Aire-echta*, ‘ Chief of the [daring] deed.’ (See Br. Laws, iv. 322, line 6 from bottom.)

spear, which ultimately resulted in his abdication, and in the expulsion of the Desii from their territory (see p. 74, *supra*). We find this institution existing in comparatively late times : for in the fourteenth century " the headship of every people who revenged the insults of [the O'Kellys of] Hy Many" belonged by right to the Mac Egans (HyM. 89).

Kings and great chiefs almost always kept bodies of mercenary soldiers—commonly small in number and often as a mere bodyguard—under regular pay, something like the soldiers of our present standing army, except that the Irish mercenaries were not bound so strictly to their service, and might apparently leave at any time for another master. They hired themselves wherever they could get the best pay. These characteristics are alluded to in the derivation given in Cormac's Glossary (p. 2) for *amos* (pl. *amuis*), which is the Irish name for a hired soldier :—" *Amos*, i.e. *am-fhos* [pron. *amos*], non-resting : he moves from place to place, from one lord to another." The temporary character of their engagement is also clearly indicated in the Brehon Law, where, in setting forth the compensation due to a chief for injuring persons he had taken under protection, it is laid down that no compensation is due for an *amos* or hired soldier, " because it is likely that he will go away from him [the hirer] without necessity."\* These hired soldiers are constantly mentioned in our ancient records. Queen Maive in the *Táin* boasts that she has 1500 royal mercenaries (*rig-amuis*) of the sons of adventurers.† Bodies of Scotchmen, and of Welshmen, were very often in the service of Irish kings : and we also find companies of Irish under similar conditions serving in Wales and Scotland (Keating, 364).

The maintenance and pay of such soldiers was called in Irish *buannacht*, whence men serving for pay and support were often called " bonnaghts " by English writers of the

\* Br. Laws, iv. 231.

† Miss Hull, Cuchullin Saga, 112 : LL, 53, 12.



time of Elizabeth. The practice of hiring foreign mercenaries, which was commenced at a very early period, was continued down to the sixteenth century : and we have already seen (p. 62, *supra*) that Shane O'Neill had a number of fierce soldiers from Scotland as a bodyguard.

The king kept a company of household troops, supported from his own revenues, who commonly resided in the neighbourhood of the palace, so as to be always within reach as a personal guard, and who fought with him in his wars. Such a body of men was commonly called *Lucht-tighe* [lucht-tee], *i.e.* 'house-company.\* Sometimes a tract of land was specially set apart for the residence of themselves and their families, which they tilled when not on actual service : and a district in the present county Cavan, once devoted to this purpose, still retains the name of "Loughtee," now applied to a double barony. The number, arms, and exact duties of the *lucht-tighe* depended on the circumstances of the particular king ; so that we find them variously described in different authorities. They consisted of men of the tribe : whereas those constituting the *amuís* or hired companies might be, and commonly were, from a distance, or from another country.

These several bodies constituted a small standing army. But where large armies had to be brought into the field, the men of the tribe or tribes owing allegiance and service were called upon to serve. It was understood, however, that this was only for the single campaign, or for some specified time, as already stated (p. 91), at the end of which they were free to return to their homes. An army of men on campaign usually consisted of individuals of all the different kinds of service.

**A Professional Warrior** or fighting man, as distinguished from a tribesman who served temporarily, was called *feinnid*, a word allied to *Fianna* (p. 87, *supra*). A cham-

\* O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, I. 391-2 : FM, A.D. 1226, note h, and 1306 : Ware, *Antiqq.*, 70.

pion was also often called a *tréin-fher* [trainar] 'strong man' (p. 63, *supra*). But a more usual word for a champion or warrior is *gaiscidheach* [goshkeeagh], from *gaisce*, 'bravery or valour': in O'Clery's Glossary *feindid* is explained by *gaiscidheach*. Very often a warrior was called *óg* or *óglach*, which simply means 'young,' a young person. *Laeach* or *laoch* is another term for a hero or warrior.

In very ancient times there were in Ireland, as in Germany, Russia, and other countries, professional female warriors or championesses—a sort of Irish amazons—who figure much in the tales. The principal Teacher of Cuculainn in the use of his weapons was the lady *Scathach-Buanand* (the daughter of *Ard-Geimne* in *Letha*), who had a military academy in Scotland, where a great many of the chief heroes of Ireland received their military education.\* In the Rennes Dinnsenchus several female warriors are celebrated: one named Etsine: and another named Brefne, who gave name to the old district of Brefney.† Ness, the mother of Concobar Mac Nessa, was a championess. All will remember a historic and still more celebrated championess belonging to another Celtic nation, Boadicea, whose Celtic name *Buadac* has the same meaning as a still better known queenly name—Victoria: *buad*, 'victory,' *Buadac* or *Buadach*, 'victorious.' These warlike Irish ladies sometimes fought with each other, using the same weapons as men. Occasionally too they fought against men, and proved tough antagonists. A successful rival of Scathagh was Aife [Eefa], who was so strong and brave that no man save Cuculainn was able to subdue her. The warlike *Medb* or Maive, queen of Connaught, was not only a great commander, but was personally expert in the use of her weapons. In one of the battles of the Táin she was engaged in the fight and wounded the hero Cethern with a cast of a *slegh* or light spear.‡

\* LL, 107, a, 42.

† Rev. Celt., xvi. 56, 163.

‡ For these and other female warriors, see Rennes Dind., No. 1, § 27.

In the Life of St. Mochua of Balla there is a curious account of two highway-women (*da ban-gaisgedhach*, 'two woman-champions') named Bec and Lithben. They took up their abode beside a perpendicular cliff near which travellers were wont to pass, and provided themselves with a big basket having two long ropes tied to the handles. When a traveller came up they laid hold of him and demanded all his valuables: and if he made any demur, they trundled him into the basket and swung him over the edge of the cliff, which commonly brought him to reason, in which case they pulled him up and sent him away unharmed, but much the poorer. On one occasion they swung over St. Mochua's gillie or servant. Mochua himself came up at the moment and demanded that they should release him: but they, in no way cowed, refused to do any such thing till the saint had to give them his cowl off his shoulders: when they drew the man up and set him at liberty.\*

**Clergy and Women exempted from War.**—In very early times both clergy and women accompanied the army on campaign, and sometimes—though not often—took part in the fighting. But in A.D. 697 a meeting of clergy and laymen was held at Tara, where, at the instance of Adamnan, a resolution was adopted forbidding women to take part in war: this was known as the *Cáin Adamnain*, or Adamnan's Law.† A little more than a century later—in 803—Aed Ordnidhe [Ornee], king of Ireland, forced Conmach, primate of Armagh, and his clergy to attend him on a hostile expedition against Leinster. On arriving at *Dun-Cuair*, now Rathcore in Meath, the primate expostulated with him on the impropriety of bringing the clergy on such expeditions. The king referred the matter to his tutor and

p. 257, in *Rev. Celt.*, xv.: O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, II. 98: K. Meyer, *Ventry*, 76, 77: and *Rev. Celt.*, xi., p. 451 (*Courtship of Emer*).

\* Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, 287.

† Stokes, *Feilire*, 147; Hyde, *Lit. Hist.*, 234; Joyce, *Short Hist.*, 186.

chief adviser, Fothad, who, after due deliberation, pronounced judgment in the form of a short canon or rule in verse, exempting the clergy for ever from attending armies in war.\*

**Instruction in Military Science.**—O'Flaherty, in his *Ogygia*, states that Cormac Mac Art founded three colleges at Tara, one of which was for teaching military science. O'Flaherty quotes no authority for this statement: and the passage is too shadowy to found any conclusion on it. On the other hand, O'Curry† writes:—"It does not appear from any original authority that I know of, that there was [in ancient Ireland] any such institution as a special military school, with regular professors and a regular system, as in the schools of literature and law." But though we cannot say that there were special military colleges, we know that the youths were carefully trained in the use of their weapons; for each was placed under the instruction of some warrior who acted as his military tutor; of which many instances might be quoted from the tales.‡ Besides, instruction of this kind formed a part of the general education of the higher classes: and when the sons of chiefs were in fosterage, the foster-fathers were bound by law to teach them, among other things, the use of their weapons.§

**Military Asylums.**—According to the "Battle of Rossnaree," in the *Book of Leinster*, there was an asylum for the old warriors of the Red Branch—in some manner corresponding with the present Chelsea Hospital, and with the Royal Hospital in Dublin—where those who were too old to fight were kept in ease and comfort: and it was under the direction of one governor or commander. It was probably supported partly at the public expense,

\* Hyde, *Lit. Hist.*, 234: K. Meyer, *Mac Congl.*, 54: Stokes, *Feil.*, 3: O'Curry, *MS. Mat.*, 363: Joyce, *Short Hist. of Ireland*, 190.

† *Man. & Cust.*, I. 367.

‡ See O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, I. 374.

§ Joyce, *Short Hist. of Irel.*, 86.



and partly by payments from the inmates : but on this point there is no information. This house was called a *rigthech* or 'royal house,' or palace, and also a *Bruiden* : and it is described as very large. When Concobar Mac Nessa, king of Ulaid, was about to raise an army to oppose the southern forces under Ailill and Maive, he went "to the three fifties of elders and old champions that are in their repose of age under [the command of] Irgalach son of Macc-Lách, having laid aside their exercise of arms and their weapons," and asked them to accompany the expedition ; not to fight but to give advice as to the conduct of the campaign. And they replied, "Let our old steeds be caught, and let our old chariots be yoked, till we go on this expedition with thee."\*

**Knighthood.**—As far back as our oldest traditions reach there existed in Ireland an institution of knighthood. The Red Branch Knights have already been mentioned : and it appears that admission to their ranks was attended with much formality. It was usual to knight boys at an early age, commonly at seven years. This was the age, according to the statement of Tigernach—and also of the Tales—at which the young hero Cuculainn was admitted : and his example as to age was often followed in subsequent times. The old Tale in which this episode of Cuculainn occurs, states that King Concobar had a number of suits of arms ready to present to boys whom he admitted to knighthood. He gave them on this occasion, one after another, to Cuculainn, who broke them all : till at last the king gave him his own royal shield, sword, and spears, which the boy kept, as they withstood his efforts to break them.† A confirmation of the existence of this custom is found in the Life of St. Carrthach or Mochuda of Lismore, where we are told that when he was yet a boy he was brought forward to

\* Hogan, Rossnaree, 21, 23.

† O'Curry, Man. & Cust., i. 364.

receive knighthood from Maeltuile, chief of Corco Luachra, in Kerry. The king began—after the ancient fashion—by presenting him with a sword and shield, which however Carrthach rejected, being resolved to follow a religious life.\* The remarkable confirmation of the Irish accounts by Froissart will be found mentioned in chapter xiv., pp. 518, 519, *infra*. This historian moreover states that the custom of knighting boys at seven, with ceremonies like those of the Irish, existed among the Anglo-Saxon kings.†

The usual Irish words for a knight are *curad* [curra] and *ridire* [riddera], of which the last is of course the same as the German *ritter*, and is probably borrowed. “Assuming knighthood” is commonly expressed in Irish by “taking valour”: thus Tigernach’s record about the knighting of Cuculainn is, “Seven years was his age when he took valour” (*do gab gaisged*).‡ But the rule of the seven years was not universally, or even generally, followed—except perhaps in case of the sons of kings or great nobles. The ceremony was commonly put off till the candidate was able to fight, as appears from the following entry in the *Cóir Anmann*:—“This was a custom of the Ulaid. Every young son of theirs who first took arms [*i.e.* took valour] used to enter the province of Connaught on a foray or to seek to slay a human being.”§

There was an order of chivalry, the distinguishing mark of which was what was called *nasc-niad* (‘champion’s ring or collar’: *nia*, gen. *niad*, a *trén-fer* or ‘champion’). Neither the order—nor of course the decoration—was conferred except it was won on the field of battle: and the person who won the *nasc-niad* was called *nia-naisc*, ‘champion of the collar’ (like the English “knight of the

\* Lynch, *Cambr. Ev.*, II. 219: O’Hanlon, *Lives of SS.*, v. 243.

† Johnes’s *Froissart*, II. 580.

‡ Tigernach, by Stokes, *Rev. Celt.*, xvi. 407: O’Curry, *MS. Mat.*, 507.

§ Stokes, *Cóir Anm. Irische Texte*, III. 405.

garter’’), and also *ridire gaisge* or ‘knight of valour’: This collar, according to Keating, was worn round the neck.\*

### 3. *Arms, Offensive and Defensive.*

**Handstone.**—Among the missive weapons of the ancient Irish was the handstone, which was kept ready for use in the hollow of the shield, and flung from the hand when the occasion came for using it. The handstone is very often mentioned in the ancient tales, but so mixed up with pure fable that we can be certain of little more than this:—Some such stone was in use, which was not a mere pebble picked up by accident, but was specially made; sometimes round (*cruinn*), and sometimes oblong and shaped with blunt angles and edges. To stones so prepared and kept for use on special occasions, some sort of malign mystical quality was often attributed, which rendered them very dangerous to the enemy. The handstone was called by various names: *cloch*, and its diminutive *clochen*, which mean ‘stone’ simply; *lia*, *lec*, *lecan*, which convey the idea of a stone somewhat flattened in shape; *lia láimhe*, ‘hand-stone’ (*lámh*, gen. *láimhe*, the hand: pron. *lauv*, *lauvë*): *lia láimhe láich*, ‘handstone of the *laech* or champion’; *lia curad*, a ‘hero’s flat stone.’†

The use of ordinary stones in battle—not specially made—is often noticed in the ancient tales. Giraldus Cambrensis says that the Irish of his time—the twelfth century—when other weapons failed them, flung stones with more force and precision than any other nation, so as to do great execution on the enemy: a statement curiously exemplified at the siege of Limerick, five hundred years after his time, when a band of 400 of the defenders

\* Book of Rights, 7: Keating, 391.

† See O’Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, i., 263 to 287.

flung stones in the faces of the Williamite assailants, having no better weapons.

**Sling and Sling-stones.**—A much more effective instrument for stone-throwing was the sling, which is constantly mentioned in the Tales of the Táin as well as in Cormac's Glossary and other authorities, in such a way as to show that it formed an important item in the offensive arms of a warrior. The accounts, in the old writings, of the dexterity and fatal precision with which Cuculainn and other heroes flung their sling-stones, remind us of the Scriptural record of the 700 chosen warriors of Gibeah who could fight with left and right hand alike, and who flung their sling-stones with such aim "that they could hit even a hair, and not miss by the stone's going on either side" (Judges xx. 16).

One of the Irish names for a sling was *tailm* or *teilm* [tellim], which is fancifully explained in Cormac's Glossary (158) as a contraction of *tell-fhuaím* [tell-ooim], from *tell*, 'a stroke,' and *fuaím*, 'sound,' i.e. 'the stroke and the sound of the ialls or thongs': from which we see that the *teilm* had two thongs. Another name for this sort of sling was *taball*: for we find *teilm* and *taball* used in a passage of the Táin for the same individual sling.\*

There was another form of sling called *crann-tabail*, i.e. 'wood-sling' or 'staff-sling,' from *crann*, 'a tree, a staff, a piece of wood of any kind'; which indicates that the sling so designated was formed of a long staff of wood with one or two thongs—like the slings we read of as used by many other ancient nations. David killed Goliath with a staff-sling. As this was called *crann-tabhail* on account of having a crann or staff, perhaps we may infer that the simple *taball* or *teilm* had no staff, and that it consisted of two thongs attached to a piece of leather at bottom to hold the stone or other missile: a form of sling which was common all over the world, and which continues to be

\* O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, I., 293.



used by boys to this day. There was a kind of staff-sling called a *deil-clis*, literally 'feat-rod,' from *deil*, 'a rod,' and *clis*, genitive of *cles*, 'a feat': and this it would appear was in some way different from the *crann-tabail*. Still another name for a sling is *trochal*, whence comes the verb *troch-laim*, 'I sling.'

Those who carried a sling kept a supply of round stones, sometimes artificially formed. In the Battle of Mucrimè, as we are told, the shields resounded with the hammering of swords and of stones (*buirribh*), the stones flung from slings. Numerous sling-stones have been

found from time to time—many perfectly round—in raths and crannoges, some the size of a small plum, some as large as an orange, of which many specimens are preserved in museums.\* A stone for a sling is often called *lic tailme*, i.e. the 'stone of the *tailm*.'



FIG. 31.

Group of warriors from Monasterboice High Cross, with swords and shields. The second from the left holds, by the end of one thong, what appears to be a *taball* or simple sling. (From Wood-Martin's *Pagan Irel.* p. 386.) This panel is given somewhat more clearly in Wilde's *Catalogue*, p. 304. (Both drawn by Wakeman.)

Some sling-missiles were specially made and kept for use on important occasions; and to these were attributed mystic virtues similar to those of the

specially made handstones. Some were composition balls made of various materials and hardened. A ball of this kind was often called *caer-clis* [*kair-clish*], 'feat-ball,' from *caer*, 'a mass or ball': as if it was expected to perform some special wonderful feats: and it was also called *uball-clis* or 'feat-apple' (*uball*, 'an apple': any small globular mass). If we are to believe the *Romantic Tales* some of these sling-balls were made up in an extraordinary and elaborate way, which imparted to them a malign destructive quality. One called the *tathlum*, made by the Dedannans,

\* See *Kilk. Archæol. Journ.*, 1885-6, p. 378: and *Wilde, Boyne*, 209.

was composed of the blood of toads, bears, and vipers, mixed up with sea-sand and hardened : and it is stated that with a ball of this kind Luga of the Long Arms slew Balor of the Mighty Blows, flinging it from his sling with such force that it went clean through Balor's eye and brain.\*

According to the Tales, the Knights of the Red Branch sometimes made their sling-missiles in a barbarous and revolting manner. In the historic tale of the death of King Concobar Mac Nessa in the Book of Leinster we read :—" It was a custom with the Ultonians at that time :—every champion they killed in single combat, to take the brains out of their heads and mix lime with them until they were formed into hard balls "† ; and these balls they kept both as trophies and as dangerous weapons, to be used on special occasions. This custom is noticed in connexion with the Red Branch Knights : but, so far as I am aware, in no other part of Irish history or tradition. It was a brain-ball of this kind that Keth Mac Magach flung at King Concobar, so that it sank into his skull, of which he died seven years afterwards. It would be hazardous and unphilosophical to brush aside these legends bodily as pure and simple fable. It seems pretty certain that hardened composition balls were made for slings, and kept for important occasions : and we have such a ball in the National Museum in Dublin, perfectly globular, and curiously streaked ; not on the surface merely, but also through its mass.

**Bow and Arrow.**—One of the Irish names of a bow was *fidbac* (or *fidbocc*, Z. 854, 12), a native word signifying 'wood-bend,' from *fid*, 'wood,' and *bac*, 'a bend.' Another name was *bogha* [bo-a], which however is a Teutonic loan-word, the same as the English *bow*. The Irish used only the long-bow : in a late authority—the picture of

\* O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, i. 252.

† O'Curry, *MS. Mat.*, 640 : De Jubainville, *L'Épopée Celtique en Irl.*, 368.

Irish soldiers by Albert Durer in 1521\*—one of the soldiers has a long-bow four feet in length: but no cross-bow appears in the group. The general length of the Irish bow, as we find it represented on the High Crosses, was from four to five feet. An arrow was called *saiget* [now pron. sy'-et or sy'-ed], probably a loan-word from Latin



FIG. 32.—Flint arrow-head.

*sagitta*. In the story of the Battle of Rossnaree (first century) in the Book of Leinster, the use of the bow and arrow is noticed more than once. But it is curious that in the historical tale of the Battle of Moyrath (fought A.D. 637), bows and arrows are not mentioned at all, though the details of the battle are given, and other weapons are named. A quiver was *saiget-bolg*, i.e. 'arrow-bag.' In the story of the Táin in the Book of the Dun Cow, the *saiget-bolg* is mentioned as among Cuculainn's arms†: and in the second Battle of Moytura one of the noises was "the rattling and the jingling of the *saicet-bolcs* or quivers" (*cairchiu ocus grindegur na saicitbolc*).‡ O'Curry translates *saicitbolc* in this passage by "belly-dart"§: and his editor, Dr. W. K. Sullivan (Introd., 452), thinks it means 'a bow': but it evidently means 'a quiver,' and so Dr. Stokes translates it. That this is the meaning appears plain from many passages. For instance, in the Irish version of part of the Aeneid, it is stated that

\* See Kilk. Archæol. Journ., 1877, p. 296.

† LU, 79, b, 7.

‡ Stokes, Moytura, Rev. Celt., XII. 99.

§ Man. & Cust., I. 253: as if it was equivalent to *gae-bulga*.

on one occasion Aeneas, seeing a herd of deer, took his bow and his *saigid-bolg* and killed a number of them.\* In later documents,



FIG. 33.



FIG. 34.



FIG. 35.

Flint arrow-heads. The makers of flint implements shaped them by chipping with stone hammers, in which they were very skilful and expert. (From Wilde's Catalogue.)

especially the Annals, there are plenty of contemporary notices of bows and arrows, to which it will be sufficient here to give some references.†

Flint and bronze arrow-heads are constantly found in all parts of Ireland, and may be seen in vast numbers in the National Museum: which points to the use of the bow in prehistoric times. In the same Museum are numerous arrow-heads of bronze, also very ancient, but probably less so in general than those of flint. Those of bronze are usually made with a hollow *cro* or socket, into which the wood was inserted.

One general assertion may be made with regard to the sling, the bow-and-arrow, and the axe:—a careful study of the Tales would lead to the conclusion that, though these arms were pretty generally used, it was rather by individuals than by armies: in other words, though

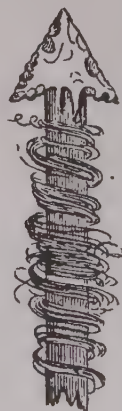


FIG. 36.

Flint-headed arrow with a piece of the shaft and the tying gut, as it was found. (From Wilde's Catalogue.)

\* Zeitschr. für Celt. Phil., 428, 429.

† Annals L. Ce, vol. I., A.D. 1221 (p. 263); 1223 (p. 267); 1230 (p. 303); 1345 (p. 647): vol. II., 1401 (p. 97): Last quotation under *Diubhracadh* in O'Donovan's Supplem. to O'Reilly's Dict.



individuals and sometimes small bodies of men used one or all, probably according to taste or inclination, neither of the three was used collectively and under general orders by large bodies of men in battle.\* In the first Battle of Moytura there is no mention of slings, bows-and-arrows, or battle-axes (Man. & Cust., I. 244). In Irish military literature swords and spears are the arms mentioned as in most general use, not only by individuals but by armies.

**The Mace.**—The club or mace—known by two names *mátan* and *lorg*—though pretty often mentioned, does not



FIG. 37.

Bronze head of Irish battle-mace: now in the National Museum, Dublin. It was fitted with a handle which was fastened in the socket. It is double the size of the picture. Weapons of this kind were in use at a very early time, long before the beginning of our regular history.

appear to have been very generally used. Each of the thrice fifty attendants of the hospitaller Da Derga held in his hand a great club of blackthorn with a band of iron.† In the Tales, a giant, or an unusually strong and mighty champion, is sometimes represented as armed with a mace. The giant encountered in the meadow by the three great Red Branch Knights in the story of the Feast of Bricriu‡ wielded a *mátan* like the *mol* or shaft of a mill-wheel. There can be no doubt that the mace was used: for in the National Museum in Dublin there are several specimens of bronze mace-heads with projecting spikes.

One of them is here represented, which, fixed firmly on

\* See O'Curry, Man. and Cust., I. 318, 348, 350. A small body using slings, O'Grady, Silva Gad., 522, bot.

† Bruden Da Derga, 57. More than eighteen centuries later, that is to say, towards the middle of last century, I often saw the men of the rival factions—"Three-year-old," and "Four-year-old"—fighting at the "big fair of Kildorrery," Co. Cork, with precisely the same kind of weapons—heavy sticks—blackthorn, or oak, or ash—with iron or lead ferrules on the end.

‡ Henderson's Fled Bricrenn, 46, 7.

the top of a strong *lorg* or handle, and wielded by a powerful arm, must have been a formidable weapon.\*

**Spear.**—The Irish battle-spears were used both for thrusting and for casting. They were of various shapes and sizes: but all consisted of a bronze or iron head, fixed on a wooden handle by means of a hollow *cro* or socket, into which the end of the handle was thrust and kept in place by rivets. The manufacture of spear-heads was carried to great perfection at a very early age—long before the Christian era—and many of those preserved in museums are extremely graceful and beautiful in design and perfect in finish: evidently the work of trained and highly skilled artists. The iron spears were hammered into shape those of bronze were cast in moulds, and several specimens of these moulds may be seen in the Museum (see chapter xxiv., sect. 3, *infra*).

Both bronze and iron spear-heads are mentioned in our oldest literature. In the story of the Táin, in the Book of the Dun Cow, it is related that Cuculainn came to a certain ford with his *cletinè* or spear, with which he had slain many of Queen Maive's best champions: whereupon she sent her poet to ask him for the spear, knowing that he dared not refuse a poet. Cuculainn gave him the spear, but being infuriated, instead of handing it to him, he flung it towards him with such force that it pierced his skull.

\* See D'Arbois de Jubainville, *La Civil. des Celtes*, p. 369.



FIG. 38.



FIG. 39.

Specimens of bronze spear-heads in the National Museum, Dublin. (From Wilde's Catalogue.)

and with the force of the blow the *uma* (i.e. the bronze) of the *cletinë* broke off and fell into the stream, which from that was called *uman-sruth*, i.e. 'bronze-stream.'\* In the same old book Cailte [Keelta] relates how he slew King Eochaid Airgthech with a cast of a spear which "went through him and into the earth beyond him, and left its iron [head] in the earth: and this here is the shaft, and the iron [*iarnd*] will be found in the earth."† In Cormac's Glossary (p. 47, "Carr"), the word *diceltair* is explained as the "shaft of a *gai* or spear without the iron head on it."

In the National Museum in Dublin there is a collection of several hundred spear-heads of all shapes and sizes, the greater number of bronze, but some of iron, and some of copper; and every other museum in the country has its own collection. They vary in length from 36 inches down. Some of the Irish names for spear-heads designated special shapes, while others were applied to spears of whatever shape or size. The words *gae*, *ga*, or *gai*; *faga* or *foga*; and *sleg* (now written *sleagh*: pron. *sla*) were sometimes used as terms for a spear or javelin in general: though more commonly they were specialised. The last, in the diminutive form *sleaghán* [pron. *slán*, the *a* sounded as in *star*] is used at present in Ireland as an English word to denote a sort of sharp slender spade for cutting peat or turf. O'Curry always translates *sleg* or *sleagh*, 'a light spear'; *foga*, 'a short spear'; and *gae*, 'a heavy spear.' The *gae* was probably the *jaculum* or dart mentioned by Giraldus in the passage where he says that the Irish had, in his time, three sorts of weapons:—a battle-axe, a short lance, and two darts (*jacula*).‡

Among the spears of the Firbolgs was one called *fiarlann* [feerlann], 'curved blade' (*fiar*, 'curved'; *lann*, 'a

\* O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, I. 298.

† Kuno Meyer, *Voyage of Bran*, I. 48, 52: LU, 133, b, 41, and 134, a, top.

‡ Top. Hib., III. x. See also O'Donovan, *Moyrath*, 153, note L.

blade'), of which many specimens are to be seen in the National Museum. The *fiarlann* was rather a short sword than a spear, in which case it would answer to the 'curved sword' (*claideamh crom*) so often mentioned in the Book of Rights.\* At any rate, there is only one type of curved blade preserved in the Museum; of which two specimens are figured here.

The heads of those spears designated by the terms *manais* and *laigen* (or *laighen*) were broad, flat, and sharp-pointed; for we find them constantly described in the Tales by the epithet *lethan-glas*, i.e. 'broad and grey-green.' O'Curry calls the *manais* a "trowel-spear"; for this word *manais* is one of the names of a trowel. The *duillen* (Corm., 61) must have been something of a like shape, for its name means 'like a tree-leaf'—'leaf-shaped.' There are numerous spear-heads in the National Museum answering these descriptive indications. *Laighen* is a diminutive form of the root *laigh* [lay or loy]: and this root-word is still represented in the modern Anglo-Irish word *loy*, which is applied to a spade in some parts of Ireland.

In the ancient Irish battle-tales a sharp distinction is made between the spears of the Firbolgs and of the Dedannans respectively: to which O'Curry first drew attention. The Firbolg spears are sometimes called *manais* and sometimes *craisech* [creeshagh]; and the *craisech* is described as broad and thick, with the top



FIG. 40.

FIG. 41.

*Fiarlanns*, now in the Nat. Mus. Dubl.

\* For examples see Book of Rights, 75, last verse. For the *fiarlann* see O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, i. 255, 295.



rounded and sharp-edged, and having a *crann-remur*, i.e. a 'thick crann or handle': a description that applies generally also to the *manais*. The spear used by the Dedannans was very different, being long, narrow, and graceful, with a very sharp point. Whether these two colonies are fictitious or not, a large number of spear-heads in the Museum answer to those descriptions (figs. 43, 44).

Other terms for a spear less usual than the preceding are:—*astol*, which in Cormac's Glossary (p. 3) is derived

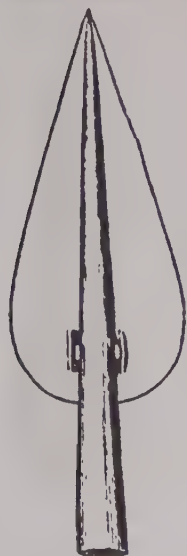


FIG. 42.

The *duillen* or leaf-shaped bronze spear-head. (From Wilde's Catalogue.) Now in Nat. Mus. Dublin.

from Lat. *hastula*, 'a little spear': *aige* (Corm. 24, "Braga"): *rincne* (Keat. 322): and *muirend*, derived by Cormac (p. 111) from *mi-rind*, i.e. *droch-rind*, 'evil point,' a 'point which causes death.' So also *carr*, which is defined as *gai*, 'a spear,' in Cormac (p. 47). That *celtair*, pl. *celtra*, was applied to a spear may be seen from this Glossary under the word *gaire* (p. 87), where *celtra catha* ('spears of battle') is defined *gae* or spears: from which again the Glossary derives *diceltair*, 'a shaft or handle of a spear without the iron thereon or without a weapon'—*di*, a negative: *di-celtair*, without a *celtair* (see also Glossary, p. 47, under "Carr," and see Voyage of Bran, I. 48, 9).

*Bir*, which properly means 'a spit,' was also applied to a spear. In a poem on Cuchorb in LL, it is said that he fed many wolves with his *bir*: and the Dalcassians in the

Battle of Clontarf had great sharp-pointed *birs* or lances. Another word for spear was *cnairrsech*, which O'Davoren defines as a "diminutive of *cnarr*, spear." *Cletine* has been already quoted as a name for Cuculainn's javelin.

The word *gabal* or *gabhal* [gowl] and its derivative *gablach* were applied to a javelin of some kind: one of the noises heard in the din of the second Battle of Moytura was "the

sound and winging of the darts and *gablaachs* or javelins" (*na foghaid ocus na n-gabluch*).<sup>\*</sup> This word is met with in other forms as applied to a spear, such as *foga fo-gablaigi*; which often occurs.<sup>†</sup> *Gabal* means 'a fork,' and *gabal* or *gablach* apparently means 'a forked spear'; while *foga fo-gablaigi* is a *foga* or spear with a fork—'a forked *foga*.' That the old Irish writers understood the word in this sense is proved by a fanciful description of a spear in the *Agallamh*,<sup>‡</sup> in which we are told that the *foga fogablaigi* was so called because on either side of it were five forks or prongs (*cinc gabla*), each having sharp sickle-shaped barbs on both its edges.

Spears with *points* (*rinn*, 'a point') are also often mentioned in the *Táin* and other old tales, apparently meaning barbed spears: five being the usual number of points: the term for this sort of spear oftenest used being *sleg coic-rinn*, a 'sleg or spear of five points.'<sup>§</sup> An incidental reference in the story of Fingal Ronain, in the Book of Leinster, would seem to show that some such spears were used:—Aedan plunged a spear (*gai*) into Mael Fothartaig, "so that he put its *points* through him" (*corruc ar-rindi triit*).|| The *foga fo-gablaigi* and the *sleg coic-rinn* were



FIG. 43.



FIG. 44.

Two bronze spear-heads in Nat. Mus. Dubl. answering the description, p. 110: fig. 43, a Firbolg spear-head; fig. 44, a Dedannan one.

<sup>\*</sup> Rev. Celt., XII. 98, 99, 118.

<sup>†</sup> Man. & Cust., II. 98. In this place O'Curry translates *faegablaige*, 'down-headed': but at p. 145 he makes *gabulgici*, 'forked spears.'

<sup>‡</sup> O'Grady, Silva Gad., 248 (Irish Text, 219).

<sup>§</sup> For instance, Stokes, Lives of SS., xxxiv.: Silva Gad., 290, with Irish Text, 256.

|| Kuno Meyer in Rev. Celt., XIII, 384: LL, 272, b, 21.

different: for we find them plainly distinguished in a passage in the *Táin*, where a tall warrior is described as coming towards Cuculainn, having in his hand two spears, one a *slég coic-rinn* and the other a *foga fo-gablaigi*.\*

But though there are hundreds of spear-heads in the National Museum, not one of them is either five-pointed, forked, or barbed: whereas if such spears were common in old times, some specimens would certainly have been found, as in the case of all the other spears. Sullivan, at page 447 of his Introduction to O'Curry's Lectures, gives figures of two forked spears—one with three points, the

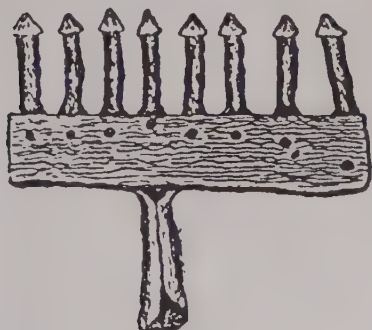


FIG. 45.

Iron pronged spear now in Nat. Mus.,  
Dub.: as described in text. (A fishing-  
spear. Drawn from the original.)

other with eight, which he considers specimens of the forked battle-spears of the tales. But these are two out of a collection of what are obviously fishing-spears now in the National Museum. They have various numbers of points up to fifteen, generally ranged in a straight row across. They are all of iron, and of rude workmanship—any good blacksmith of the

present day could make one equal to the best of them. They do not show a trace of artistic taste or finish—such as we find in perfection in the bronze spear-heads: they all seem comparatively modern; and what is more to the point, they are small, light, flimsy things that would go to pieces in five minutes' fighting. One of the two given by Sullivan is represented here, so that the reader can judge for himself. It is five inches broad at the points, and the

\* LL, 76, a, 29: see the English in Hull, Cuch. Saga, 170. Distinguished also in another passage of the *Táin*: O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, II. 98, note. Here O'Curry translates *cuicrind*, "flesh-seeking," I do not know on what grounds.

prongs are  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches long. The socket is  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches long, and just large enough to receive a slight wooden handle *half an inch thick*.

Perhaps *gabál* or *gablach* in its application to a spear does not mean 'forked'; and this seems to be Stokes's opinion when proposing a derivation of the words.\* But this does not touch the difficulty of *Coic-rinn*, whose meaning seems beyond doubt. The whole question is obscure, and for the present it must be left unsettled—at least by me.

Spearheads had a *cro* or socket, in which the handle was generally fastened by rivets. The shaft or handle had generally a ferule or ring of horn (*adharc*, pron. ey-ark) on its upper end to keep it from splitting. In the Brehon Law (iv. 227) we read of a *cnairsech* or spear measuring twelve fists "between its iron head and the place where the horn is put upon its end": which entry also shows the length of the handle as between five and six feet.

The Irish casting-spear was usually furnished with a loop of string called *suanem* or *suaineamh* [soonev] attached to the handle, near the middle, and made of silk or flax. The Greeks and Romans had a loop of a similar kind on their spears—called *amentum* by the Latins: but how exactly the loop was used by Greeks, Romans, or Irish, or what its effect was, is not well understood.† We only know that, like the Roman soldier, the Irish warrior put his forefinger (*corr-mér*) in the loop in the act of casting. Such entries as the following are constantly found in the Tales:—In the Battle of Moyrath (p. 285), Cuanna, "pressing his foot on the solid earth [to balance himself and take good aim], put his finger in the string of his broad-headed spear and made a cast at Congal": Cailte "put his valorous

\* In Rev. Celt. xii. 118: see also *gaból lórg* ('*gaból-club*') in LU, 84, a, 23: and in the Irish Text of Silva Gad., 148, 30. What was this *gaból-lórg*, which is often mentioned as a recognised weapon?

† Smith, Dict. Gr. & Rom. Antiqq., "Hasta."



forefinger into the thong of the spear" (*tuc a chormér gaiscid i suainem na sleighe*).\*

The use of poison on spears and arrows was known to the ancient Irish : for we find individual poisoned weapons, especially spears, often mentioned in the Tales. But poisoned weapons formed no part of the Irish military system, and they were not used in battle.†

Some of the spears of the heroes of the Red Branch and other great champions are described in the old legends as terrible and mysterious weapons. The spear of Keltar of the Battles, which was called *Lón* or *Luín*, twisted and writhed in the hand of the warrior who bore it, striving to make for the victim whose blood was ready for spilling. This, according to the legend, was originally the spear of a Dedannan chief, which he left on the battle-field of Moytura, where it was picked up, and ultimately reached Keltar. Some spears were regularly seized with a rage for massacre ; and then the bronze head grew red-hot, so that it had to be kept near a caldron of cold water, or, more commonly, of black poisonous liquid, into which it was plunged whenever it blazed up with the murder fit.‡ This reminds us of the spear of Achilles, which, when flung at Lycaon, missed the intended victim, and, plunging into the earth, " stood in the ground, hungering for the flesh of men " (*Iliad* XXI.). So also *Iliad* VIII. — " My spear rageth in my hands."

**Sword.**—The ancient Irish swords were, in their general shape, much like those used by most other people of both ancient and modern times. The Irish were fond of adorning their swords elaborately. Those who could afford it had the hilt ornamented with gold and gems. In the

\* Stokes, *Acall.*, Ir. Texte, iv., p. 193.

† In many or most of the passages where poisoned weapons are mentioned, the expressions are obviously figurative, meaning nothing more than bitter or deadly in wounding : just as we say a person has a *venomous* tongue, like *nemthenga*, ' poison-tongue,' the term applied to the poet Bricriu (p. 84, *supra*).

‡ See Hennessy, *Mesca Ulad*, *Introd.*, xiv, xv, and xvi : Hogan, *Rosnaree*, 79 : and Stokes, *Da Derga*, 299, 301.

Book of Rights (p. 147) we are told that the hostages delivered up to the king of Ireland by the people called Oirghialla [oar-yeela] should wear—as a distinction—swords with studs of gold on the hilts: and swords of this kind are often mentioned in the old writings.\* But the most common practice was to set the hilts round with the teeth of large sea-animals, especially those of the sea-horse—a custom also common among the Welsh. This practice was noticed by the Roman geographer Solinus in the third century A.D.:—"Those [of the Irish] who cultivate elegance adorn the hilts of their swords with the teeth of great sea-animals" (*dentibus marinarum belluarum insigniunt ensium capulos*).† The native records, both lay and ecclesiastical, are equally explicit on this point. Adamnan (page 158) relates that a certain native of Connaught, who had been reduced to a state of slavery, came to St. Columba at Iona, who, to enable him to purchase his freedom, presented him with "a sword ornamented with the carved teeth of animals" (*macheram belluinis ornatam dolatis dentibus*). The native term used for a sword ornamented in this fashion is *claideb dét*, literally 'sword of teeth,' or some such expression, of which examples are found everywhere in the Tales, as well as in ecclesiastical literature.‡ Warriors sometimes ornamented the handles of their javelins in the same manner, as we know from a statement in the Táin, that on one occasion during the fight between Cuculainn and Ferdiad they "took up their eight spears, called *gotha n-dét*," i.e. 'darts [with ornaments] of teeth.'§

That the Irish used swords from the earliest times is obvious from all the preceding: and it is not a little

\* As in Moyrath, 67: and in LL, 55, b, first line (swords *comuleltib óir ocus con imdurnib argit*, 'with knobs of gold and with guards of silver').

† See Lynch, *Cambr. Ev.*, II. 179.

‡ As in Stokes, *Three Homilies*, 65: Moyrath, 67: O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, vol. I. 253 (note 192), 297 (note 230); and vol. II. 138.

§ O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, I. 303.

curious that Giraldus (Top. Hib., III. x), in the twelfth century, makes no mention of the sword as among their weapons. He says they had three kinds of weapons:— a short spear, two darts, and a heavy iron battle-axe. The omission of the sword makes one suspect that he is inaccurate or had not full information: or perhaps, as O'Donovan remarks, that the battle-axe was generally used when

Giraldus visited Ireland (Moyr., 193, note s). The sword figured prominently in the Battle of Clontarf, a century and a half

before his time, and it is constantly mentioned in the period immediately succeeding his visit.

The two commonest Irish terms for a sword were *cloidem* or *claideb* [cleev]\* and *colc* (or *colg* or *calc*): another, but much rarer name, was *cloinn* (Corm. 40). The *cloidem* was different from the *colc*, for they are evidently distinguished in the Battle of Moytura, which speaks of the flashing and clashing of



FIG. 46.



FIG. 47.



FIG. 48.

Ancient Irish bronze swords. The hilts were riveted on: the four large rivets on the middle one still remain. Fig. 46 is 22½ inches long; fig. 47, 10½ inches; and fig. 48, 18 inches. (They are not drawn here to uniform scale.) Originals in National Museum, Dublin. (From Wilde's Catalogue, pp. 442, 448, 444.)

the *cloidems* and of the *calcs*. The *colc* was a 'small

\* De Jubainville thinks this Celtic word is the origin of the Latin *gladius*: *Civilisation des Celtes*, 378.

straight sword': so O'Curry always translates the word. It would seem that *cloidem* was a generic name for a sword, the *colc* being a sort of *cloidem*. A *claideb-mór*—'great sword'—a sword of the largest size, is often mentioned.\* The Scotch have retained this name to the present day in the form of 'claymore,' which nearly represents the proper sound. A short sword or dagger was much in use among the Irish: called a *scían* [skean], literally a 'knife': but the sword and the dagger merge into each other.†



FIG. 49. FIG. 50.

Bronze daggers. Fig. 49 found in Galway, with its yew handle almost perfect. (From Wilde's Catalogue.)

The blade (*lann*) was kept in a sheath or scabbard which was called by several names: *Fintech* or *findiuch*, *truaille*, and *faighin*.‡ Sometimes the sheath was made of bronze: and several of these are preserved in museums. The beautiful specimen figured here was found in the crannoge of Lisnacroghera near Broughshane, Co. Antrim.§ That part of the hilt grasped by the hand was called *dorn* or *durn* (i.e. 'fist'), round which was a guard called *indurn* (*im*, 'round': 'round the fist': see LL, 55, *a*, 4 bot.).



FIG. 51.

Bronze scabbard, found in a crannoge Now 19½ in. long; but the top has been broken off. (From Kilck. Arch. Journ. for 1889, p. 100.)

Swords sometimes had special names. Fergus Mac Leide's

\* For instance, Rev. Celt., XIII. 459, and XIV. 405.

† See Wilde's useful article on swords and daggers: Catalogue, 439-467.

‡ For these terms see Rev. Celt., XIV. 426, par. 47: LU, 91, *a*, 28: Corm., 77 and 161.

§ Kilck. Arch. Journ. for 1889, p. 96.



sword, with which he killed the sea-monster, was called the *Calad-cholg* ('hard-blade').\* Finn Mac Cumail's sword was called *Mac-an-Luin*, 'the son of the *Luin* or *Lón*,' which was made "the son of Luno" by Macpherson throughout his "Poems of Ossian."†

The sharper a sword was the more it was prized. A common expression in the Tales is that a sword was so sharp that it would cut a hair floating on water; or cut hairs blown against its edge by the wind.‡ Socht's sword would cut a hair off a man's head without touching the head; and would cut a man in two "so that neither half knew what had befallen the other."§



FIG. 52.

Stone celt, the earliest form of battle-axe belonging to primitive pagan times. Found in County Monaghan, in its handle (13¼ in. long), as shown in figure. Whether all stone celts were fastened in this manner is unknown. (From Wilde's Catalogue, p. 46.)

The battle-axe (*tuag* or *tuagh*, pron. tooa) has been in use from prehistoric times in Ireland, as is evident from the fact that numerous axe-heads (or 'celts') of stone, as well as of bronze, copper, and iron, have been found from time to time, and are to be seen in hundreds in the National Museum and elsewhere. These are now commonly called *celts*, of which the illustrations on pp. 118 and 119 will give a good idea. But many of what are now called celts were probably used as cutting-tools, as noticed in chapter xxiv., section 5.

Battle-axes are often mentioned in ancient Irish literature. Cuculainn, on one occasion, when making ready for a fight, says to his attendant: "Take out the axes quickly"—*Oslaic go troit tuaga*.|| So also the battle-axe is

\* O'Grady, *Silva Gad.*, 284.

† About *Luin* and *Mac an Luin*, see Hennessy, *Nesca*, *Introd.*, xv: *Kilk. Arch. Journ.*, 1895, 228: O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, i. 324-5.

‡ As in O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, II. 148: *Fled Bricr.*, 117.

§ *Irische Texte*, III. 218.

|| Ventry, 86 (note 864): *LL.* 102, *b*, last line; also 103, *a*, first two lines.

mentioned under the curious name *cuach-snaidm* in a description of the reception of Conobar and his people by Conall, the brewy of Dun Colptha in Cuailnge :—  
 “Conall had apart for each warrior the hero-war-axe” (*Cuach-snaidm-curad*).<sup>\*</sup>  
*Cuach-snaidm*, literally ‘cup-knot,’ is sometimes applied to a spiral sort of knot or wreath on the hair of the head :† but it is not easy to see how it came to be applied to a battle-axe. All these facts and records show that Giraldus is wrong in his assertion that the Irish borrowed the use of the axe from the Norsemen : though it is true that they often used Scandinavian axes, as well as those of native make.

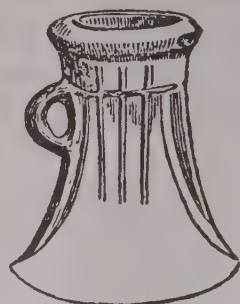


FIG. 53.

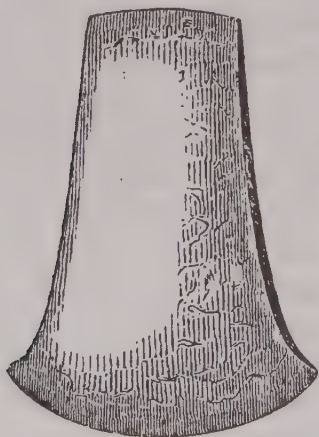


FIG. 54.

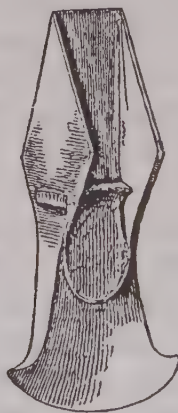


FIG. 55.

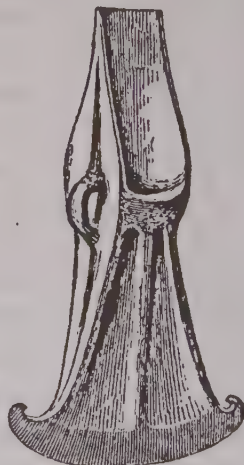


FIG. 56.

Four types of metallic celts or early battle-axes. Fig. 54 is 6 inches long, and of pure copper; all the rest are bronze. Fig. 55 is 6½-inches long; fig. 56, about the same; and fig. 53, 3¾ inches. In all cases the make gives a good idea how they were fastened in the handles. (From Wilde's Catalogue, pp. 385, 363, 381, 373.)

In later times the Irish were noted for their fatal dexterity with the battle-axe. Giraldus (Top. Hib., III. x.)

<sup>\*</sup> Stokes, Rev. Celt., XIV. 417, and LL, 109, *b*, lines 5 and 4 from bottom: also Corm., Gloss., 47.

† Silva Gad., 139; Irish version, 128, 8: Stokes, Acallaml, 393: see also Rosnaree, 68, 12.

mentions that among other weapons they had a heavy axe excellently well wrought and tempered ; and he goes on to say :—" They make use of but one hand to the axe when " they strike, and extend the thumb along the handle to " guide the blow : from which neither the crested helmet " can defend the head, nor the iron folds of the armour the " rest of the body. From whence it has happened, even in " our times, that the whole thigh of a soldier, though cased " in well-tempered armour, hath been lopped off by a single " blow of the axe, the whole limb " falling on one side of the horse, and " the expiring body on the other."



FIG. 57.

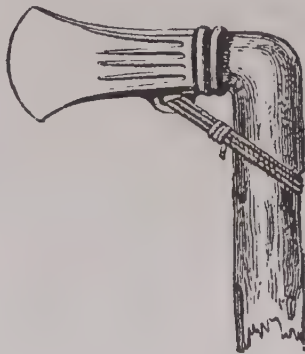


FIG. 58.

To show how the metallic celts or axe-heads were fastened on handles. Fig. 57 shows one found in its original handle, as seen in the illustration. It has a loop underneath, which is partly eaten away by rust. Fig. 58 is a conjectural restoration of the fastening of this kind of celt. (From Wilde's Catalogue, pp. 370, 367.)

In Giraldus's time almost everyone carried an axe in his hand, as people wore swords at a later period : a custom which he denounces in the bitter style usual with him when he had a fault to find :—" From an ancient and evil custom " they [the Irish] always carry an axe in their hands, " instead of a walking-stick, that they may be ready to " execute on the spot whatever villainy comes into their " minds : wherever they go they carry this weapon." (Top. Hib., III. xxi.)

There were two kinds of battle-axes : a broad one,

generally used by galloglasses, and a long, narrow one, called a *sparra* or *sparth*: examples of both are illustrated in figures 59 and 60, pp. 121 and 123. The narrow axe seems to have been the earlier form.

**Sharpening edged Weapons.**—There were various means of sharpening arms. Sometimes the warriors used ordinary whetstones. O'Clery, in his Glossary, explains the word *airtnemh* [artnev] as meaning "a whetstone on which a hero's or a soldier's arms are sharpened." In several of the ancient tales we find mention of a smooth block of stone, usually set up on the *faithche* or green of a king's fort, on which the warriors used to sharpen their weapons. In the story of the Agallamh, Cailte, St. Patrick and others come to a pillar stone which was named *Cloch-nan-arm*, the 'Stone of the arms or weapons'; and when asked why it had that name, Cailte replied that the Fena of Erin used to come to it every Samain-tide to sharpen their weapons.\* Beside the house of Pichan, a Munster chief, "there was a "huge block and warriors' stone "of strength—very smooth—on "which spears and rivets were wont to be fastened [when "they got loose], and against which points and edges were "wont to be ground: and a warrior's pillar-stone (*Corthi* " *curad*) was that flag (*lecc*)."<sup>†</sup>

It is worthy of remark that, at the Battle of Moytura, a woman was employed to grind the weapons (*fri bleth arm*) of the Dedannans.<sup>‡</sup>

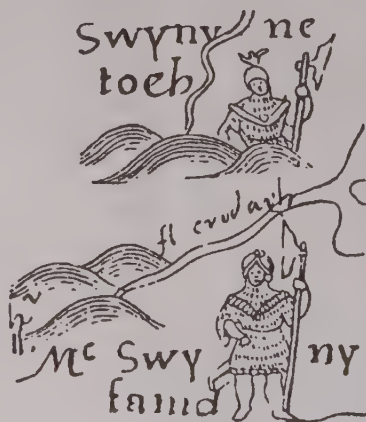


FIG 50.

Two galloglasses depicted on a map of Ireland of 1567. From State Papers of Henry VIII., Ireland, vol. II. Showing the broad battle-axe. One of the two galloglasses in fig. 65 below holds a broad axe. The sparth is seen in figure 60.

\* O'Grady, *Silva Gad.*, 207, 209. See Wood-Martin, *Pag. Irel.*, 54.

† K. Meyer, *Mac Congl.* 46.

‡ Rev. Celt., xii. 95.



**Armour.**—We know from the best authorities that at the time of the Invasion—*i.e.* in the twelfth century—the Irish used no metallic armour. Giraldus (Top. Hib., III. x.) says :—“ They go to battle without armour, considering it a burden, and deeming it brave and honourable to fight without it.” The Irish poet Mac Conmee, in his poem on the Battle of Down, in which the Irish were defeated by the English in 1260, has this passage :—

“ Unequal they entered the battle,  
The Galls [English] and the Gaels of Tara .  
Fine satin shirts on the race of Conn ;  
The Galls in one mass of iron.”\*

This is sufficient to prove that the ancient Irish did not use armour : for, as O'Donovan remarks, it is not to be supposed that they used it at one time and left it off afterwards. The Danes wore armour : and it is not unlikely that the Irish may have begun to imitate them before the twelfth century : but, if so, it was only in rare cases. They never took to armour till after the twelfth century, and then only in imitation of the English.† It is true that in some of the tales giving accounts of battles fought before the time of the Danish incursions, we read that the Irish used iron coats of mail (*luirech iairn*) : as for instance in the Battle of Moyrath (p. 193) ; but the only inference to be drawn from this is that the versions that have come down to us were written at a comparatively late time, when the writers were acquainted with the use of armour and introduced it to embellish their stories.‡ But though the Irish did not use armour before the Danish invasions, they knew well what it was—as we might expect from their intercourse with the Continent ; and the borrowed word *luirech* (Lat. *lorica*) had become well naturalised : for we find a *luirech*—corselet or coat of mail—mentioned in Fiacc's Hymn, sixth or seventh century (Trip. Life, p. 411, verse 26).

\* Miscellany of Celt. Soc., 1849 (O'Donovan), p. 153.

† See O'Donovan, Moyr., Introd. viii.

‡ See Zimmer, on this point, referred to at page 535, *infra*.

The tales describe another kind of armour as worn by Cuculainn and by others ; namely, a primitive corselet made of bull-hide leather stitched with thongs, " for repelling lances and sword-points, and spears, so that they used to fly off from him as if they struck against a stone " ;\* and as we know that the material for this was produced at home (chap. xxvi., sect. 5), the record is pretty certainly a true one. But the general body of Irish soldiers fought in linen tunics dyed saffron, and the chiefs sometimes in satin or silk, which lost them many a battle against the Anglo-Normans.†

Greaves to protect the legs from the knee down were used, and called by the name *asán* (pl. *asáin*), which is a diminutive of *as* or *ass*, 'a sandal.' P. O'Connell, in his Dictionary, has *asáin phráis ara luirgnibh*, 'greaves of brass on his shins' : but, no doubt, the greaves of early times were made of leather, like Cuculainn's corselet.‡ Occasionally greaves were called *assi* simply : *se dub-assi*, 'six black greaves' (Da Derga, 288, 289). Sometimes, as a safeguard against assassination, a king wore a slab of tough yew on his breast under his silken robes : and we read in the Annals that this precaution once saved the life of Congal, king of Ireland (A.D. 704 to 711).§



FIG. 60.

Dermot Mac Murrough, with the narrow battle-axe called "sparra" or "sparth" : from the MS. of Giraldus mentioned under the figure of the scribe in chapter xii., sect. 2, below. For Dermot Mac Murrough, see Joyce's Short History of Ireland, Index. This figure was copied into the original manuscript twenty-nine years after Dermot's death. (Reproduced here from Wilde's Catalogue, p. 370. The soldier figured in chapter xxii., section 2 below (under "Trousers") also holds a sparth.)

\* Crowe, *Demon. Chariot*, 426, 427.

† See O'Donovan, *Moyr.*, 181, notes *c*, *d* : 187, lines 5 to 9 ; 235, last par.

‡ See Stokes, *Glossary to Marco Polo*, *Zeitschr. für Celt. Phil.*, 1. 427.

§ O'Grady, *Silva Gad.*, 448.

**Helmet.**—That the Irish wore a helmet of some kind in battle is certain : but it is not an easy matter to determine the exact shape and material. It was called *cathbharr* [caffar], i.e. ‘ battle-top,’ or battle-cap, from *cath* [cah], ‘ a battle,’ and *barr*, ‘ the top.’ In the Battle of Moyrath (141), the Irish army proceeded to array their forces “ and harnessed their arch-princes in protecting helmets ” : on which O’Donovan remarks in a note : “ Nothing has yet been “ discovered to prove what kind of helmet the ancient Irish “ *cathbharr* was, whether it were a cap of strong leather, “ checkered with bars of iron, or a helmet wholly of iron “ or brass, such as was used in later ages. One fact is “ established, that no ancient Irish helmet made of the “ latter materials [iron and brass] has been as yet discovered.” In the Battle of Mucrim (fought A.D. 250) the two Luguids each wore a ‘ crested helmet ’—*cathbharr ciorach*.\* From the “ Book of Rights ” (p. 263), we learn that helmets were sometimes coloured. Part of the stipend of the king of Gacla was “ four helmets of equal colour ” (*cómhdhatha* : i.e. all similarly coloured). De Jubainville (vi. 343) says that the helmet is not mentioned at all in the most ancient Irish texts, and that wherever it is mentioned the passage indicates a relatively recent composition. It occurs, however, as we have seen, in the “ Battle of Mucrim ” in the Book of Leinster : and the *cennbarr* or helmet is mentioned in one of the Prefaces to the Táin.†

**Shield.**—From the earliest period of history and tradition, and doubtless from times beyond the reach of both, the Irish used shields in battle. The most ancient shields were made of wicker-work, covered with hides : they were oval-shaped, often large enough to cover the whole body, and convex on the outside. It was to this primitive shield that the Irish first applied the word *sciath* [skee'-a], which afterwards came to be the most general name for a shield, of whatever size or material. It is curious that this word

\* O’Grady, *Silva Gad.*, 356.

† O’Curry, II., 157, note 234.

*sciath* is still common in Munster, even among speakers of English, and is applied to a shallow oblong osier basket—similar in shape and material to the ancient wicker shield :\* and this is probably its original application. This wicker shield continued in use in Ulster even so late as the sixteenth century, as Spenser testifies :—“ Their long broad “ shields, made but with wicker roddes, which are commonly “ used amongst the said Northern Irish.” Elsewhere he says they were large enough to cover their whole bodies.† But wicker shields were often made much smaller and lighter. Such shields continued to be used in the Highlands of Scotland so late as 200 years ago (Rob Roy, xxxi).

Smaller shields, commonly round, made either of yew or of bronze, were also used. It was so usual to make them of yew that the word *iubhrach* (‘ made of *iubhar* or yew ’), came to be applied to them.‡ In the National Museum there is a fine specimen of a yew shield. Specimens of bronze Celtic shields have also been found : but they are rare in Ireland, though common enough in Britain and Scotland. A very fine one, figured next page, was found in a bog in County Limerick. It is of thin bronze  $27\frac{3}{4}$  inches in diameter, ornamented with bosses, hammered into shape on solid moulds or blocks. This shield was first described by Mr. Maurice Lenihan, of Limerick, in a Paper in Proc. R. I. Acad., vol. for 1870-76, p. 155.

Shields were ornamented with devices or figures, the design on each being a sort of cognisance of the owner to distinguish him from all others. “ There was a law made by “ the Ultonian knights ”—says the ancient story quoted by O’Curry§—“ that they should have silver shields [*i.e.* shields “ ornamented with silver] made for them, and that the “ carved device of each should be different from those of

\* O’Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, I. 330. The word was, and is, quite common in Munster.

† View, 96, 103, 104. ‡ *Trans. Gael. Soc.*, 33 ; story of Sons of Usna.

§ *Man. & Cust.*, I. 329.





FIG. 61.



FIG. 62.

Bronze shield mentioned in text (p. 125). Fig. 61, front or outside; fig. 62, back or inside.  
(From Proc. Roy. Irish Acad., for 1870-76, Plate VIII.)

"all the others." These designs would appear to have generally consisted of concentric circles, often ornamented with circular rows of projecting studs or bosses, and variously spaced and coloured for different shields. The same old tale goes on to describe how the devices on Cuculainn's shield were made ; namely, by a *luathrinn* or moulding compass, with which the artist struck out a number of circles on a smooth layer of ashes to serve as a pattern.\* In the Bruden Da Derga (p. 174) we read that Cormac Condlingas had a shield with five golden circles on it. As generally confirming the truth of these accounts, the wooden shields in the Museum have a number of beautifully wrought concentric circles standing out in relief.

There were ornaments or ornamental fittings called *tuag-míla*, the exact nature of which has not been determined : commonly made of, or ornamented with, gold or silver. The name, according to some, indicates that they consisted of animal forms, curved or mixed up with curved designs ; for *tuag* means ' a curve or loop,' and *míl* [meel], ' an animal,' plural *míla* : ' loop-animals.' By O'Curry, Stokes, O'Grady, Crowe, Henderson, Windisch, the word *tuag-míla* has been variously translated, " clasps," " fastenings," " hooks," " loop-animals," " animal figures chased," " interlaced creatures," " buckles," " trappings." Perhaps after all, Stokes's proposed explanation of *míl* is the true one ; namely, that in this connexion it does not mean ' animal,' but a pin or tongue of some kind. For we know that *míl*, in one of its applications, means ' a probe or pin,' and that *milech* means a kind of *dealg* or brooch (see Vol. II., p. 248). If this is so, the *tuaga* were most probably little bands, straps, or braces, varied in material and shape according to use, ornamentally chased or embroidered, and fastened with buckles and hooks. The *tuag-míla* were, in this case, the little buckle-pins or tongues, from which the whole buckle-strap

\* See also vol. II. p. 299, *infra* : where this incident, with the story referred to by O'Curry, will be found.

took its name. All this is rendered the more likely by the fact that, though *tuag-mila* are most commonly mentioned in connexion with shields, they were also used on ladies' kirtles, and on the yokes of chariot-horses.\*

Shields were often coloured according to the fancy of the wearer. We read of one warrior having a shield designated *craeb-corcra*, i.e. showing the colour of the quickenberry: the shield of another was brown (*domn*).† Part of the *tuarastal* due from the king of Tara to the king of Offaly was four coloured shields (*ccithre sceith datha*); in another part of the same book a tribute of four red shields is mentioned;‡ and in the story of *Mesca Ulad* (p. 29) King Concobar is described as having a purple-brown (*dond-chorcra*) shield. Conall Cernach had "a blood-red shield which has been speckled with rivets (*semmannaib*) of findruine between plates of gold" (Da Derga, 199). This fashion of painting shields in various colours continued in use to the time of Elizabeth, as we see by Spenser's statement (View, 102):—"In Ireland they use "also in many places [round leather targets] coloured after "their rude fashion." Shields were very often pure white. Thus Bodb Derg and his cavalcade had all of them white-faced shields (*sceith thulgeala*).§ The Book of Leinster describes the Ulstermen as having, on a certain occasion, "beautiful all-white shields."

We know from many passages that the wicker shields were covered with hides, either tanned or untanned. Thus in the story of the deaths of Goll and Garb in the Book of Leinster, a certain warrior's shield is described as covered with black leather (*dub-lethar*).|| Shields were covered by a special tradesman called a *tuathait*, who fitted the leather

\* Used on Shields—MS. Mat., 506, 14; 507, 6: Silva God. (Irish text), 128, 7: Fled. Bricr., 65, 3 (with note 19 beginning on p. 62). On *Lenes* or kirtles—Ir. Texte, I. 119, 18: Da Derga, 13, 14: Man. & Cust., II. 190, note; Táin Bó Fr. 136, 16. On a chariot yoke—Man. & Cust., II. 160, note: Bec Fola, p. 174, tt.

† O'Grady, Silva Gad., 240, 28; 324, 29.

‡ Book of Rights, 253, 263.

§ O'Curry, Man. & Cust., II. 157.

|| Rev. Celt., XIV. 405.



very accurately, and sewed it at the seams. The *tuathaits*, as the glossator in the Brehon Laws (v., 107, 16) explains, "sew the hides round the shields." But in another part of the Laws (II. 118, 25), this word *tuathait* or *tuithait* is used for a wooden-shield-maker in general, as is seen from the expression classifying the *tuithait* with a carpenter as "using the adze and hatchet"; and accordingly O'Donovan here translates *tuithait* by 'shield-maker.'

Hide-covered shields were often whitened with lime or chalk, which was allowed to dry and harden, as soldiers now pipeclay their belts. This explains such expressions as the following, which we often meet with in descriptions of battles :—[During the Battle of Mucrim] "a white cloud of chalk and a cloud of lime rose towards the clouds [of the sky] from the shields and bucklers when struck by swords and spears and darts."\* And in the Fled Bricrenn the heroes fall to fighting in the palace, so that "there was an atmosphere of fire from [the clashing of] sword and spear-edge, and a cloud of white dust from the *cailc* or lime of the shields."†

Another name for a shield was *lumain* or *lumman*, which, in a passage in the Yellow Book of Lecan, is fancifully derived from *leoman*, 'a lion'; from the practice of painting a lion on the shield, "in order that its hatefulness and its terror might be the greater."‡ This passage is valuable in another way, as pointing to the practice of painting animals on shields. A small, light shield or buckler was often called *bocoit*, which literally means a 'spot.' In the above extract from the Battle of Mucrim, the shield is called *sciath*, and the buckler *bocoit*.

The shields in most general use were circular, small, and light—from 13 to 20 inches in diameter—as we see by numerous figures of armed men on the high crosses and in manuscripts, all of whom are represented with shields of this

\* O'Grady, *Silva Gad.*, 356.

† Henderson, p. 15, sect. 15.

‡ O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, I. 327.



size and shape.\* I do not remember seeing one with the large oval shield.

Shields were cleaned up and brightened before battle. Those that required it were newly coloured, or whitened with a fresh coating of chalk or lime: and the metallic ones were burnished. This was generally done by gillies or pages. On a certain occasion when there was an assembly of kings and chiefs at Kincora, we are told that the gillies were assembled in one room brightening up the shields of their masters.†

It was usual to give special descriptive names to the shields of distinguished chiefs. In the Battle of Moyrath (p. 153), we read that the javelin of Conall, which was aimed at King Domnall, passed through three shields interposed by his followers to shelter him, and struck *Derg-druimnech* (*i.e.* 'red-backed'), the golden shield of the monarch himself. The shield of King Conobar Mac Nessa was called *Acéin* [ak'kane], that is, 'ocean.'

The shield, when in use, was held in the left hand by a looped handle or crossbar, or by a strong leather strap, in the centre of the inside, as seen in fig. 62 at page 126. But as an additional precaution it was secured by a long strap, called *sciathrach*, that went loosely round the neck. In the "Battle of Rossnaree" (p. 25) Queen Maive says:—"So long as there shall be amongst us one who will be able to take the hilt of a sword [in his hand] and the shield-strap (*sciathrach*) of a shield about his neck." Another word for this sling-strap was *iris*: Conan Mail on one occasion escapes from a battle, *ocus iris a sceith imma braigit*, "and the sling of his shield round his neck,"‡ intimating that he had dropped it from his hand in his flight, but that it remained suspended from his neck by the strap. In the Brehon Laws (v. 310, line 4 from bot.), the strap on

\* See for three examples, this vol. at pp. 102 and 143; and the figure of the king in vol II., p. 257.

† O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, I., 124, 126. ‡ Stokes, *Acall.*, pp. 187, 252.

the inside of the shield by which it was held in the hand is called *sciathlach*, which, like *sciathrach*, is formed from *sciath*, only with a different termination.\* The shield, when not in use, was slung over the shoulder by the strap from the neck.

It was usual for a champion to hurl a challenge to single combat by standing in front of the hostile camp or fort and striking a few resounding blows on his shield,† or on a shield hung up for this purpose at the gate outside. This old custom is remembered to this day in the speech of the people of the South and West of Ireland: for whether speaking English or Irish, they call a man who is quarrelsome and given to fighting—a swaggering bully—by the name of *Buailim-sciath* [boolim-skee], meaning literally “I strike the shield,” and equivalent to the English *swash-buckler*, which may possibly commemorate a similar custom among the old English.

In pagan times it was believed that the shield of a king or of any great commander, when its bearer was dangerously pressed in battle, uttered a loud, melancholy moan which was heard all over Ireland, and which the shields of other heroes took up and continued. In the battle of Rosnaree (pp. 43, 51), the king of Tara attacked Conobar furiously and struck his shield, which moaned; and the shields of all the Ulstermen took up the moan, by which the chiefs knew that their king was in danger and rushed to his aid. When the lady *Crede*, lamenting her dead husband *Cael*, praised him for his valour, she said, among other things, that “his shield never uttered a moan in time of battle”—a certain proof of strength and bravery.‡ The shield-moan was further prolonged, for as soon as it was heard, the “Three Waves of Erin” uttered their loud, melancholy roar in response.§

\* See “*Sciathlach*” in Atkinson’s Glossary to Br. Laws.

† For a late example of this, see Hyde, *Two Irish Tales*, 153.

‡ O’Grady, *Silva Gad.*, 122.

§ For the “Three Waves of Erin,” see vol. II., p. 525.

#### 4. *Strategy, Tactics, and Modes of Fighting.*

**Subordination of Ranks.**—Though the discipline of the Irish in time of war and on the field of battle was very inferior to that of the Anglo-Normans, we are not to conclude that they were ignorant or careless of the Science and Art of War. On the contrary, military science was studied with much care, as the following examination of their strategic and tactical arrangements will show.

The whole army was divided into *catha* [caha] or battalions, each *cath* consisting of 3000 men; and these again were parcelled into smaller companies. Over each battalion was a *cath-mhilidh* [cah-veela] or 'knight of a battalion'; each band of 100 was headed by a captain called *cenn-feadhna* [can-fana]; and there were leaders of fifty and leaders of nine (Keat., 348). Any body of soldiers was called *buidhean*, Old Irish *buden*: an army on march was *sluagh*, 'host'; hence the word *sluaghadh*, *slauigheadh*, or *slogad*, a military expedition, 'a hosting.'

**Encampment.**—During marches the leaders were very particular about their encampments. Even when the halt was only for a night or two, careful arrangements were made as to tents, sitting-places, sleeping accommodation, bathing, cooking, etc.; and everything was done to make the encampment comfortable and enjoyable. In all cases the camp was fortified, so far as the time permitted: and of course sentinels (*dercaid*, 'a sentinel,' literally 'a watchman': from *derc*, 'to see') were set while the army slept. Where the sojourn was likely to be pretty long, more elaborate arrangements were made. In the "Battle of Moylena" (p. 75), the *longphort* or encampment of Owen-More, king of Munster—the opponent of Conn the Hundred Fighter—is described: and this description may be taken as a type of all, where the army sat down for any length of time;—A well-ordered, wide-extending encamp-

ment, a resting-place of many streets in the centre of Magh Lena. The *pupall* or pavilion of the king was pitched on a smooth hill. Men were despatched into the surrounding woods to bring trunks, and poles, and branches, while others went to the adjacent marsh, from which they brought bundles of sedge-grass. With the wattles and branches they constructed huts and tents with sleeping-places and beds, with posts and racks on which to hang up their helmets and arms. All were arranged in an orderly fashion, in streets, with roads and paths in every direction. And they made special enclosures for markets, where provisions and other commodities could be bought and sold ; they made cooking-places, and large halls for feasting, music, and amusements ; after which they surrounded the whole encampment with three defensive circumvallations, having trenches and strong palisades.

The commanders in all cases took good care to bring their poets, story-tellers, musicians, jugglers, jesters, and so forth, so that, whether the encampment was for a long or a short halt, they might amuse and enjoy themselves as if they were at home.\*

**Sentinels and Watchmen.**—In the early stages of society, when wars were frequent, look-out points were very important : sometimes they were on the seashore. In the ancient tales, Ben-Edair or Howth, near Dublin, a rocky projecting headland 600 feet over the sea, is celebrated as the great look-out point of the middle eastern coast ; and the Fena of Erin constantly kept a sentinel there to sweep the horizon for invaders. This plan was adopted with good reason ; for in early days British marauding parties often landed there, of which several instances are recorded in the old tales and other documents. We know that Howth was until lately a usual port for vessels from Britain.

Near every palace there was a look-out point, or more than one, at which guards always kept watch. The main

\* O'Donovan, *Three Fragm.*, 45 : Hogan, *Rossnaree*, 5 : LL, 61, a, bot.



road, called Midluachra, leading from Tara to Ulster, ran by the Fews mountains; and in a pass on the southern slope of Slieve Fuaid, their highest summit, by which invaders from the south would have to pass, was *Ath-na-foraire* [furrera], the 'ford of watching,' a name which is explained in the Táin:—"Because there is an Ultonian champion constantly watching and guarding there, in order that no warriors or strangers should come unperceived into Ulster." The very summit of the mountain was also used as a watch-station: it was called *Finncharn na foraire* (the 'white carn of the watching'), where, during the war of the Táin, a champion constantly kept watch to safeguard Ulster.\*

The practice of signalling at night by beacon-fires in time of war, invasion, or disturbance of any kind, was general: and in the story of Bruden Da Derga, a legendary origin is assigned for it. When the army of marauders was approaching the hostel of Da Derga, in which Conari, king of Ireland, was staying with his retinue, the sons of Dond Desa, who were unwilling partners in the expedition, went aside and made a *tendal* or beacon-fire to warn the king of the intended attack on the hostel: "So that is the first warning beacon that has been made in Erin"—says the story (p. 170)—"and from it every warning beacon is kindled to this day."

Immediately beside the palace, or the temporary residence, of every king or great chief a sentinel or watchman (*dercaid*) kept watch and ward day and night. In time of battle or campaign warriors slept at night with a single weapon by their side for use in any sudden alarm, their principal arms hanging on the racks in the proper place.†

\* See O'Curry, Moylena, 59, note 1: Man. & Cust., I. 365: Stokes, *Cóir Anm.*, 403: LL, 65, a, last lines. How far the customs of placing sentinels on look-out points, and of signalling at night by beacon-fires, have impressed themselves on the local nomenclature of the country, may be seen from the sections bearing on the subject in Joyce's *Irish Names of Places*: vol. I., p. 214.

† Moylena, p. 127.

**Heralds.**—In the course of warfare, heralds or envoys were often employed, as among all other nations. A herald was denoted by the words *techtair* and *eachlach*. Herald, when on their mission, were regarded as sacred and inviolable, and were treated with the utmost respect, even by the bitterest enemies : exactly as Homer describes the heralds of the Greeks. When it was proposed to send Fergus Mac Roy as an envoy from Queen Maive to the hostile Ulster army, he naturally shrank from the mission ; for he was himself one of the Ulstermen who had entered Maive's service, and was one of the chief authors of all the ravages the Connaught forces had committed in Ulster. But Maive told him not to fear, " for," said she, " it is not ever a custom of the Ulstermen to offer reproach to envoys. For if a man should kill the father or brother of every one of them, he need not fear them, going to meet them as a herald."\* At a much later time Cummuscach, son of King Aed Mac Ainmirech, was slain, A.D. 598, by Branduff, king of Leinster, who sent envoys north to announce the news to the father. The envoys when asked for their message refused to tell till they had first got a guarantee of safety. King Aed gave them his drinking-horn as a pledge : whereupon they said, " We have killed thy son and slain his people." Aed answers, " We had heard these tidings already : yet ye [being envoys] shall depart unhurt ; but nevertheless we will go after you " [to avenge by open war in Leinster the death of the prince].† Herald had a special dress by which they were at once recognised ; and they commonly carried in one hand a white wand or hand-staff, and in the other a sword,‡ symbolical of the alternative to be accepted—peace or war.

**Banners, Flags, and Standards.**—From the earliest period of their history the Irish used banners or standards, which

\* Rossnaree, 65.

† Boroma in Rev. Celt., XIII. 65 : Silva Gad., 411, top.

‡ Hogan, Rossnaree, 69 : O'Curry, Man. & Cust., I. 297.

were borne before the army when going into battle, or on ordinary marches : a custom, as De Jubainville points out,\* common to the Celts and Romans, but unknown to the Homeric Greeks. In Ireland the office of standard-bearer to each king or chief was hereditary, like all other important functions.†

A banner is denoted by the word *méirge* [mairya : 2 syll.]. In the accounts of many of the ancient Irish battles, there are descriptions of the standards borne by each chief or clan. The commander-in-chief had his own banner, and so had each captain under his command : and each banner usually bore some device or figure, commonly called *suaicheantas* [soohantas] or *samlach*, so that the several captains and companies could be distinguished from a distance. "Every captain," says Keating (p. 472), writing from old authorities, "bore upon his standard his peculiar device or ensign, so that each distinct body of men could be easily distinguished from all others by those *shanachies* whose duty it was to attend on the nobles when about to contend in battle, and that these *shanachies* might thus have a full view of the achievements of the combatants, so as to be able to give a true account of their particular deeds of valour." The attendant *shanachies* of those old times answered in some sort to the war correspondents of our own day.

In the Battle of Moyrath, A.D. 637, banners of various patterns and devices are mentioned. That of Congal, prince of Ulster, the leader of the rebel host, was a yellow lion on green satin, which, we are told, was the proper royal standard of Ulster, and had been, since the time of the Red Branch Knights, six centuries before, and which was now displayed by the rebel prince. In this battle the banner of the king of Aileach (one of the Hy Neill) was

\* La Civil. des Celtes, 390, 391.

† Hardiman, *IarC.*, 369 ; *Minstrelsy*, II. 158.

black and red; of Sweeny, king of Dalaradia, yellow satin; of the king of the Ards, white satin.\*

Many other banners and devices are described in other authorities. The *suaicheantas* of O'Doherty was a sword and a golden cross, with a lion and blood-red eagle on white satin: of O'Sullivan, a spear with an adder entwined on it: of O'Loughlin of Burren (in Clare), an oak with a champion defending it, together with a blue anchor and a golden cable.† The mountain ash or rowan-tree in full bloom, the yew-tree, a piper with his bagpipes, hounds, deer, etc., were also adopted as banner devices by various other kings and chiefs.‡

How numerous these banners were in an army prepared for battle may be judged from the words of Branduff, king of Leinster, before the Battle of Dunbolg, when, looking down from a height on the encampment of his adversary the king of Ireland, he said it seemed like a great stationary bird-flock of mixed colours, such was the number of banners floating on tall poles over the booths.§

**Cathach or 'Battler.'**—In Christian times it was usual for the ruler of a clan, tribe, or sub-kingdom, to have a relic, commonly consecrated by the patron saint of the district, which the chief brought to battle with him, in the hope that it would ensure victory: somewhat as the Jews used the Ark of the Covenant. Such a relic was called a *cathach* [caha], i.e. *præliator* or 'battler.' The usual formula for the use of the *cathach* was to cause it to be carried *desiol* or sunwise—commonly by an ecclesiastic—three times round the army before the battle began. When the king of Ulster invaded Munster, St. Findchua of Brigown marched at the head of the king of Munster's

\* Moyrath 231.

† *Ibid.*, 349: Keat., 471, *et seq.*

‡ Trans. Oss. Soc., v. 160: see also Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, 239.

§ O'Grady, *Silva Gad.* 413. In addition to the preceding authorities, see O'Donovan's valuable note on the armorial bearings and banners of the ancient Irish, Moyrath, 343.



forces against him from Bruree, with the *cenncathach*, i.e. his crozier in his hand : and before the battle began, he walked thrice *deisiull* with it round the Munster host. In the ensuing battle the Ulster forces were routed.\*

The most celebrated of these battle-relics was the *cathach* or battle-book of the O'Donnells of Tirconnell, which may now be seen in the National Museum in Dublin.† The *cathach* of the O'Kellys of Hy Many was the crozier of their patron, St. Grellan. This was for ages kept by the family of O'Cronelly, and it was in existence in 1836 : but it is now not to be found (HyM, 81). St. Caillin of Fenagh blessed a *cathach* for his tribe, the Conmaicne, namely, a cross made of a hazel rod that had been cut with one blow, the top of the upright to pierce the horizontal bar in the middle. It appears from the words of the old record that no one relic was kept permanently here, as in other cases, but that on each occasion, when going to a battle, a new cross was to be made in the manner pointed out above.‡ The condition of striking off the branch or rod with a single blow was evidently a perpetuation of the corresponding pagan formula described at pp. 241, bot. and 242, top ; now turned to Christian uses.

The permanent *cathach* or battle relic of each tribe was placed in the keeping of some particular family. This was considered a great honour, and the family had usually a tract of land free of rent, as well as other perquisites, as payment for the faithful discharge of their duty as custodians. The *Mac Robhartaighs* or Mac Ravertys were the official keepers of the *cathach* of the O'Donnells, and continued in the office till the seventeenth century ; and to this day the land they held in virtue of their office is called Ballymagroarty.§

\* Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, 240.

† Adamn., 249, 319 : Todd, *St. Patk.*, 125 : O'Donovan, *Moyrath*, 147, note *f*. See also Joyce, *Short Hist. of Irel.*, 19 ; and p. 501, *infra*.

‡ Hennessy, *Bk. of Fenagh*, 195-7. § Reeves, *Adamn.*, 38, 284, 401.

**Chivalry.**—In Ireland, in ancient times, people as a general rule declined to take advantage of surprises or stratagems in war. They had a sort of chivalrous feeling in the matter, and did not seek to conceal—and sometimes even gave open notice of—intended attacks, or came to an agreement with their adversaries as to the time and place to fight the matter out.\* In later ages, and at the present day, such plain, unsophisticated dealing would be looked upon as very bad generalship. Concobar, having arrived at Dundalk on his march south to overrun the southern provinces, is met by an envoy to propose terms: but he rejects the terms and prepares to resume march. Then the envoy asks him where he proposes to encamp the first night:—"In Rossnaree above the clear-bright "Boyne," said Concobar. "For Concobar"—the story goes on to say—"never concealed from his enemy the place "in which he was to take station or camp, that they might "not say that it was fear or dread that caused him not to "announce it." The result was, when he arrived at Rossnaree, he found the Leinstermen fully prepared for him.† Before the first Battle of Moytura, the Dedannans, who were the invaders, demanded battle each day, with equal numbers on both sides: to which the Firbolg king had to agree, though greatly against his will, for he had much the larger army.‡ Before the Battle of Moylena (end of second century A.D.), Owen-More, being closely pressed by his great opponent Conn the Hundred Fighter, sent to ask him for a truce of three days to consider his position, which Conn at once granted.§

The same spirit is found much later on. In the year 1002, when Brian Boru marched with an army to Tara, and demanded from King Malachi submission or battle, Malachi asked for a delay of a month to muster his forces for battle; which Brian granted, and remained in his camp

\* An instance in Man. & Cust., II. 261, top. † Hogan, Rossnaree, 29.

‡ O'Curry, Man. & Cust., I. 238.

§ O'Curry, Moylena, 23.

till the month was expired. And Malachi employed the interval—with Brian's full knowledge—in preparing for the struggle : but failing to raise sufficient forces, he proceeded to Brian's camp, with merely a small guard of honour, and submitted without imposing any conditions, trusting to his opponent's honour for proper treatment, but telling him plainly that if he had been strong enough, he would fight. And his confidence was not misplaced ; for Brian, while receiving his submission, treated him with the utmost respect and honour.\*

A similar chivalrous sense of fair play is exemplified in individuals. An episode in the story of the Táin describes how Cuculainn and Ferdiad, two old friends and affectionate comrades were forced by circumstances to fight to the death in single combat : and the fight was continued for several days. Each evening when word was given for the combat to cease, they laid aside their weapons, and each threw his arms round the neck of the other, and thrice kissed his cheek. Cuculainn, on this occasion, had better medical appliances than Ferdiad, but Ferdiad had a more varied supply of food and drink : and each evening Cuculainn sent his best doctor with half of his balms and healing herbs to soothe Ferdiad's wounds : while Ferdiad on his part sent half of all his choice food and drink to his friend. At last Ferdiad is slain, and Cuculainn falls on his body in a paroxysm of uncontrollable grief, from which he is with difficulty roused up by his attendant Loeg. This may be fiction : but all the same it embodies the high chivalric ideals of war and battle prevalent in the time of the original writer.†

**Stratagem : Ambush.**—But not unfrequently a general rose up with unusual military genius and with less scrupulous notions of chivalry, who did not hesitate to employ am-

\* Todd, Wars of GG, 119 : Joyce, Short Hist., 208.

† See the full episode of the fight of Cuculainn and Ferdiad in O'Curry, Man. & Cust., II. 415. Well retold in Lady Gregory's Cuch., 221-244.

bush (Ir. *etarnaid*) and other stratagems. In A.D. 598, Aed Mac Ainmirech, king of Ireland, marched southwards from his palace of Ailech with a great army to avenge the death of his son (p. 135, *supra*), and to exact the Boruma tribute from Leinster : but he was met at Dunbolg by Branduff, the astute and powerful king of Leinster, with a much smaller army. Now Branduff, seeing no hope of success in open battle, had recourse to stratagem. He collected 3600 oxen carrying great hampers, in each of which was concealed an armed man covered over with provisions : and he set out by night with these and with a herd of 150 untamed horses towards the monarch's encampment. When they approached the camp, the advance guard, hearing the trampling and the din, started to arms, and questioned the party. They replied that they were a friendly contingent bringing a stock of provisions for the king of Ireland : and when the guard, on examining the sacks, saw the provisions, they let them pass. The party passed on till they entered the royal enclosure, and tying bags filled with pebbles to the tails of the wild horses, they let them loose among the tents, which caused terrible confusion. In the midst of the uproar the men in the sacks, cutting themselves loose at a signal, and forming in ranks, attacked the camp. The royal forces were completely surprised ; and after a dreadful fight in the darkness, they were routed ; and the king, fleeing from the field, was overtaken and slain.\* Two thousand years before the time of Branduff, the Egyptian general Tahutia—as we read in Flinders Petrie's translation of the ancient papyrus record—took Joppa by smuggling into the city armed men hidden in great sacks under horse provender. When Lewy Mac Con invaded Ireland, A.D. 250, he won the Battle of Mucrime and the throne of Ireland by the stratagem of concealing a large party of his men in pits and recesses covered over with strong hurdles and bushes, who remained quietly till the others

\* O'Grady, *Silva Gad.*, 412-13, and 417-18.



had passed, and then sprang up and attacked them in the rear.\*

**Medical Attendance in Battle.**—A number of physicians or surgeons always accompanied an army going to battle to attend to the wounded, who were brought to them at the rear during the fight. This was quite an established institution from the most remote times—a fact of which there can be no doubt, notwithstanding the number of fables and exaggerations that are mixed up with the accounts of their cures. We are now familiar with the humane practice in war of giving medical aid after the battle to the wounded, without distinction of friend or enemy : and it is interesting to observe that the same idea was equally familiar to the writers of the *Táin Bó Quelna*. When Cethern, a famous Ulster warrior, returned from a fight against the Connaught forces, all covered with wounds, a request was sent to the Connaught camp—the enemy's—for physicians for him, as it happened that none of the Ulster physicians were at the moment available : and physicians were at once despatched with the messenger.†

**Military Formation and Marching.**—In going to battle the Irish often rushed pell-mell in a crowd without any order. But they sometimes adopted a more scientific plan, advancing in regular formation, shoulder to shoulder, forming a solid front with shields and spears. When the southern army was about to engage the forces of Ulster, who had marched south to invade Munster, St. Findchua called out to the Munstermen :—" When you have closed in together at one place, make ye a strong palisade of battle " (*Cippe Catha*) : and in that fashion, led by Findchua, they advanced to the attack, and routed the Ulstermen.‡ In another battle, the Ulstermen, just as they were about to engage, " set themselves in battle array, and there was a

\* O'Grady, *Silva Gad.*, 355 and 356.

† O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, II. 97, note.

‡ Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, 240 : *Irish Text*, line 3101.

"forest of their weapons, and a bulwark of their shields" (*leibheann da sciathaibh*, literally a platform or floor of "their shields) around them."\* The word *cro*, which means 'a pen or fold,' is often applied to a formation of this kind. In the story of the Boroma we read that when the men of the royal army saw their king in danger in the Battle of Dunbolg, they formed a *cro* of spears and shields about him.† The Leth Conn made a *cró bodba*, 'a warlike fold,' around Molling and his company to take them prisoners.‡ On one occasion Queen Maive hid her face under a *dam dabaich*, i.e. an 'ox-vat,' of her guards' shields, for protection against Cuculainn's terrible sling.§

There is at least one passage that mentions stepping in time while marching, where the men of one of Queen Maive's three corps are spoken of as lifting and bringing down the feet exactly together (*innoenfhecht dostonbaitis a cossa||*), showing careful drill. But this does not seem to have been general: indeed it is noticed as a speciality in this one corps. On the morning of the day of battle each man usually put as much food in a wallet that hung by his side as was sufficient for the day.¶

**Tying in Pairs.**—When a commander had reason to suspect the loyalty or courage of any of his men in a coming battle, he sometimes adopted a curious plan to



FIG. 63.

Foot-soldier preparing to receive charge. One of several grotesque figures in the illustrations of the Book of Kells (seventh century). This shows that when receiving a charge, the Irish soldiers—sometimes at least—went on one knee. (From Wilde's Catalogue, p. 299.)

\* Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, 244; with Irish Text, 3250. For another *leibheann sciath* see LL, 79, a, 15.

† O'Grady, *Silva Gad.*, 418, 16.

‡ Rev. Celt., XIII. 115; O'Grady, *Silva Gad.*, 423.

§ LL, 79, a, 12.

|| LL, 55, b, 8.

¶ *Silva Gad.*, 418.

prevent desertion or flight off the field. He fettered them securely in pairs, leg to leg, leaving them free in all other respects.

Just before the Battle of Moyra'h (A.D. 637), Congal, the leader of the rebel army, consisting partly of Irishmen and partly of foreigners, sends a confidential scout to reconnoitre the king's army "if they had locks or fetters between every two of their fighting soldiers." Then follows a statement in verse that the royal commanders had "put a fetter " between every two men, so that neither young nor old, " even though hard pressed, should flee." Congal, on his part, on receiving the report of his scout, fettered those of his men in pairs who appeared to him deficient in courage : in some cases an Irishman being coupled with a Briton or with an Albanach. At the close of the battle, when the rebels were defeated and took to flight, nearly all those who were fettered, being unable to escape, were slaughtered.\* Four centuries before Moyrath—A.D. 250—Lugaidh Mac Con invaded Ireland with an army of Britons and other foreigners, to wrest the throne from Art the Lonely, king of Ireland : which he succeeded in doing at the Battle of Mucrim in Galway (see p. 141, *supra*). On landing from Britain, he was joined by a considerable contingent of Irishmen. Just before the battle, fearing the Irish soldiers might not remain faithful to him, inasmuch as they were about to fight against their lawful king Art, he had most of them tied, the leg of each man to the leg of a Briton : and each of those who were not so tied he placed between two Britons.† In the second Battle of Moytura there is no direct mention of men being tied together : but a curious expression occurs in one part of the description which seems to indicate that some were fettered in pairs. Among those who fell in the battle we are told there were some *léth-dóine*, literally 'half-men.' Now this is the very idiom used in Irish to denote one of a pair : *leth-shúil*

\* Moyrath, 87, 177, 179, 282, 319.

† Silva Gad., 355.

(literally 'half-eye'), meaning one eye of the pair: and similarly *leth-duine* is one man of a pair. The meaning of this expression is otherwise inexplicable: or rather it has no meaning at all.

I find one instance of this custom as practised by the Welsh, in a battle fought by them against the Irish during the time of the Irish invasions in Wales. It is mentioned in one of the ancient Welsh Triads:—"The tribe of Cas-wallawn Law Hir put the fetters of their horses on their feet by two and two in fighting with Serigi Wyddil—the Irish commander—at Cerrig u Gwyddel or Holyhead" [see p. 78, *supra*] in Mon, *i.e.* in Anglesey.\*

**Horse and Foot.**—Cavalry did not form an important feature of the ancient Irish military system: we do not find



FIG 64.

Horse-soldier or gentleman with attendant and horseboy. From Derrick's *Image of Ireland*: 1578. Derrick's pictures of Irishmen are all more or less caricatures: and they are the more misleading, inasmuch as the caricature generally is not sufficiently violent or pronounced to be obvious to the general reader (see next page).

cavalry mentioned at all in the Battle of Clontarf, either as used by the Irish or Danes. But kings kept in their service small bodies of horse-soldiers, commonly called *marc-shluagh* [morkloo], 'horse-host.' For example, in the *Senchus Mór* (Br. Laws, 1. 5) it is stated that King Laegaire, in the time of St. Patrick, appointed his nephew, Nuada Derg, chief of

\* Jones, *Vestiges of the Gael*, p. 14. See Miss Hull, "Early Chr. Irl." p. 54, note.



his *marc-shluagh* or cavalry ; and when King Dermot was preparing for the Battle of Culdremne, he collected " horse, foot, and chariots." The chief men too rode in battle, as at the battle of Ballaghmoon, where the leaders fought on horseback.\* After the Norman Invasion cavalry came into general use. Each horseman had at least one footman to attend him—called a *gilla* or *daltecn* (Irish, *dailtín*, a diminutive of *dalta*, q.v.)—armed only with a javelin. In later

times each horseman had two and sometimes three attendants (fig. 64).†

Two kinds of foot-soldiers are often mentioned in Irish records, the kern and galloglasses. The kern were light - armed soldiers : they wore headpieces, and fought with a *skean* (a dagger or short sword) and with a javelin. The Irish name is *ceithern* [kehern], which primarily means a body of men of any kind, though commonly restricted to a body of soldiers. It



FIG. 65.

Two of the eight galloglasses on King Felim O'Conor's tomb in Roscommon Abbey (thirteenth century). (From Kilk. Archæol. Journ., 1870-1, p. 252.) For Felim O'Conor see Joyce's Short History of Ireland, p. 291. (Two galloglasses are also depicted in fig. 59, p. 121, *supra*.)

is a collective noun, like the English 'horse,' 'foot,' 'infantry,' &c. The word for a single soldier of the body is *ceithernach* [keherna]. The kern are a very ancient institution, as we find them noticed in the accounts of the early battles ; for instance, in that of the Battle of Moyrath, fought A.D. 637, they are mentioned more than once (pp. 141, 267, 350) ; and they continued in

\* O'Donovan, Three Fragm., 201, 209.

† Silva Gad., Pref. xxii.

use till late times, for they figure very much in the Irish wars of the Tudors.

The galloglasses, or *galloglach*, as they are called in Irish, appear only in later times—after the Anglo-Norman Invasion. They are not met with in ancient Irish writings. They were heavy-armed infantry, wearing a coat of mail and an iron helmet, with a long sword by the side, and carrying in the hand a broad, heavy, keen-edged axe. They are usually described as large-limbed, tall, and fierce-looking. It is almost certain that the galloglasses, and the mode of equipping them, were imitated from the English. So Spenser says—and O'Donovan agrees with him—"For gall-ogla signifies an English servitour or yeoman," in which Spenser is quite correct. Irish, *gall*, 'an Englishman'; *óglach*, 'a youth or warrior.'\*

**Commanders.**—In ancient times the commanders commonly fought side by side with their men. But sometimes the wiser plan was adopted, of placing the general aside in some commanding station to direct the tactics.† It was customary for the commanders, just before the battle, to go from battalion to battalion and address their men in a few inspiring words, of which there are many examples in the histories and tales.‡

**Trumpets.**—The Irish constantly used bronze war-trumpets in battle, as will be found mentioned in the chapter on Music. At the Battle of Ballaghmoon, A.D. 908, in which Cormac Mac Cullenan was killed, "trumpets were blown, and signals were given for battle by the men of Munster."§ There is a curious notice of the use of battle-trumpets in Ireland in a gloss or commentary on

\* Spenser's View, 117 to 119. See Ware, *Antiqq.*, 161: and Sentleger's account of kern and galloglasses in Moyrath, 350.

† Of which examples may be seen in Keat., 272, 364: *Rev. Celt.*, xii. 89, 93, 97: Silva Gad., 541.

‡ See Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, 238: Joyce, *Short Hist.*, 217 (Brian Boru at Clontarf): *Three Fragm.*, 191.

§ *Three Fragm.*, 207: see also in same, 191: and *Man. & Cust.*, i. 344.

St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, xiv. 8—written on the Continent in the eighth century by an Irishman in his native language, from which it appears that the trumpeters had different notes or musical phrases to direct different movements. The following is Dr. Stokes's translation of this note :—" This is another similitude which he " has—even a similitude of a trumpet ; for it hath many " sounds, and different is each of them : to wit, it is " different for battle, different for unyoking, or for march- " ing, or for sleep, or for council. Unless the man who " sounds it distinguish—that is, if he make but one note " —what it is sounded for is not understood."\*

**War-Cries.**—The armies charged with a great shout called *barrán-glaed*, ' warrior-shout,' a custom which continued until late times. The different tribes and clans had also special war-cries, which are noticed by Ware (" Antiqq.," 163), and by Spenser (95). The Anglo-Normans fell in with this custom, as they did with many others. The war-cry of the O'Neills was *Lamh-derg aboo*, i.e. ' the Red-hand to victory ' (*lamh*, pron. lauv, ' a hand '), from the figure of a bloody hand on their crest or cognisance : that of the O'Briens and Mac Carthys, *Lamh-laidir aboo*, ' the Strong-hand to victory ' (*laidir*, pron. lauder, ' strong '). The Kildare Fitz Gerald's took as their cry *Crom aboo*, from the great Geraldine castle of Crom or Croom in Limerick ; the Earl of Desmond, *Shanit aboo*, from the castle of Shanid in Limerick. The Butlers' cry was *Butler aboo*. Most of the other chiefs, both native and Anglo-Irish, had their several cries. Martin found this custom among the people of the Hebrides in 1703 (p. 104) : and in Ireland war-cries continued in use to our own day : I heard them scores of times in the faction fights of Limerick sixty years ago. Though our knowledge of these cries is derived mostly from late Anglo-Irish

\* Stokes and Strachan, Thesaurus, i. 577. See also Dr. Wm. Stokes's Life of Petrie, 330 ; and Zimmer, Gloss. Hib., 78, 19.

writers, it is highly probable that they were in use in early times.\*

**Counting the Slain.**—In the story of *Bruden Da Derga* (p. 169) we get a curious glimpse of the way of estimating the number of men who fell in a battle. When the army of marauders under Ingcel, with the sons of Dond Desa, were marching to attack the hostel (see chapter xxi., vol. II., p. 171), knowing well that they would encounter formidable resistance, each man brought a large stone; and they threw them all in one heap on the plain. On returning after the fight each brought away a stone from the carn: and the stones that were left showed the number killed, and served as a memorial of the destruction of the mansion with the slaughter of the king and his people. But though carns were sometimes erected with the object stated here, they were generally—as shown in vol. II., p. 563—simple memorials of the dead.†

Sir Samuel Ferguson (“*Poems*,” 1880, p. 61) remarks that, perhaps, the latest instance of this practice was the carn erected by the Farquharsons, in 1745, when marching to the Battle of Culloden. He also points out that a similar means of estimating the slain was in use by the ancient Persians, as recorded by Procopius: but here each man, instead of bringing a stone for a carn, threw an arrow into a common basket.

**Decapitation.**—After a battle the victors often decapitated the bodies of their dead enemies. Sometimes they placed the heads in a heap as a sort of triumph—a barbarous custom common among other ancient nations. For instance, when the Norsemen fought a battle in

\* See an article on War-Cries of Irish Septs, in *Ulster Journal Arch.*, III., 203, in which will be found a long list of them.

† On the formation of a carn in this manner, and for these objects, see *Rev. Celt.*, xv. 331: LU, 86, *b*, and 87, *a*: Atkinson, *Introd. to LL*, 50, *a*, bot.: Gwynn, *Dind.*, 63. For a similar formation of Carn Mail, see Rennes *Dind.* in *Rev. Celt.*, xvi. 48: and *Miscellany Celt. Soc.*, p. 67: also LL. 170, *b*, 17, and 210, *a*, 31, 30. See also Mac Carthy, *Codex-Pal.-Vat.*, 198, note: and Sullivan, *Introd.*, 335.



Ireland among themselves, A.D. 851, the victors piled up a great *carn* of Danish heads on the field.\* This practice by the Irish is so often mentioned that it is needless to give instances. Hence also the carnage in battle is often designated *ár-cenn* [awr-cann], 'a slaughter of heads.'† It should be remarked that the Irish did not kill the wounded, but brought them from the field of battle as prisoners. An instance may be seen in the Four Masters under A.D. 864, when Aed Finnliath, king of Ireland, having defeated the Danes, made a heap of the heads of the slain, and had the wounded conveyed away to a place of safety.

Whenever a king or chief was defeated and slain in battle, he was usually decapitated: and it was a custom for the victorious king to sit upon the head or place it under his thigh by way of triumph. When Archbishop Cormac Mac Cullenan, king of Munster, was slain in the Battle of Ballaghmoon, A.D. 908, some persons brought his head, after the battle, to the victorious King Flann Sinna, thinking it would be an acceptable presentation: and they said:—"Life and health, O victorious king: here is the head of Cormac for thee: and now, as is customary with kings, raise thy thigh and place this head under it and press it down." But the king was very angry with them: and instead of showing disrespect to the head, took it up tenderly, and kissing it three times, sent it back to be interred honourably with the body.‡ This atrocious custom, as Keating's translator, O'Mahony, calls it, existed in a still more savage form in early times. Conall Cernach, the inveterate enemy of Connaught, killed at least one Connaughtman every day, and never slept without the head of a Connaught enemy under his knee (*fo a glún*).§

\* O'Donovan, *Three Fragm.*, 117. On Decapitation: see D'Arbois de Jubainville, *La Civil. des Celtes*, pp. 374-377.

† In *Zeitschr. für Celt. Phil.*, III. 207, Stokes interprets *ár cend*, as 'a slaughter of chiefs,' which the context here favours. But I think it generally carries the sense of decapitation. ‡ O'Donov., *Three Fragm.*, 213: Keat., 530. § LL, 107, a, 22: and Atkinson, *Introd.*, 27, a.

**Treatment of Prisoners.**—It was the custom, except under circumstances that rendered it improper, inconvenient, or undesirable, to fetter or manacle prisoners or captives taken in war, slaves, and occasionally hostages. We know that a person might be taken in bondage in dstraint for a debt ;\* and such a person was often secured by a gyve and lock. The law permitted this ; but if the chain was tightened so as to cause pain, there was a penalty.† In another part of the *Senchus Mór* a lock to secure the gyves of an imported slave is mentioned.‡ A captive taken in battle was almost always secured by a fetter (*cuibhrech*) ; and such a person was commonly given over to a keeper, whose business it was to guard against escape. Some fetters were recognised by law, and some not : and when the *Book of Aicill* lays down rules as to how far the keeper was responsible in law for damages, in case the captive should make his escape, or for crimes committed by him after escaping, the sort of fetters used was taken into account.§

When Murkertagh of the Leather Cloaks made his circuit round Ireland, A.D. 941, he brought away many kings and chiefs as captives, several of whom were fettered. Cormacan Ecces, the writer of the poetical account of the expedition, says :—“ We carried off with us Lorcan, “ descendant of Bresal of the Cows : a rough bright fetter “ (*geimiul* or *geimheal*) was fastened on that arch-king of “ populous Leinster.”|| In the case of some kings, fetters were not considered necessary on this occasion ; and this is mentioned as a mark of distinction or consideration : —“ Concobhar, the arch-king of Connaught,”—says Cormacan—“ exceeding brave, came with us without a “ bright fetter.”

Of the material and manner of fastening fetters,

\* Page 202, *infra*.

† Br. Laws, I. 143.

‡ Br. Laws, I. III.

§ *Ibid.*, III. 499.

|| O'Donovan, Circuit, 39.

whether used on prisoners of war or otherwise, we get various glimpses in the old narratives. When Callaghan, king of Cashel, was brought away captive by Murkertagh, there was put "a ring of fifteen ounces on his hand, and "a chain (*idh*) of iron on his stout leg."\* When Dichlethe O'Triallaigh attempted to go away on a dangerous pilgrimage, his brothers "took him and fettered him, placing [a "chain secured by] a lock of iron between his head and his "feet."†

**Modes of Submission.**—A king who was about to submit to another usually came to the superior king's residence, and, after the formalities of reception, indicated his submission by placing his hand in the hand of his host.‡ But when the submission was brought on directly by defeat in battle, it was usually of a more humiliating kind. In the seventh century, Dermot, one of the two joint kings of Ireland, and Guaire, king of Connaught, quarrelled. Guaire was defeated, and made "submission at the point of the sword." This was usually done in the following manner:—The person submitting lay supine, while his conqueror inserted the point of a sword or spear between his teeth, and held it there as long as it pleased him—sometimes for an hour or more—when he released him from the degrading position.§ It was sometimes called *gíallad fri claideb*, 'submission by sword,'|| or *gíallad do rinn gai*, 'submission at the spear's point.' This same ceremony was sometimes used, nine centuries later, by the English deputies of the time of Elizabeth, when they forced Irish chiefs to submit.

**Single Combat.**—Among the Irish, as well as among the Gauls¶ and other ancient peoples, men often challenged

\* O'Donovan, Circuit, 45.

† O'Donovan, HyF, 39.

‡ Moylena, 55, bottom.

§ Silva Gad., 424, line 5, bottom, and 434: Keat., 436. How the Irish kings submitted to Henry II. may be seen in Ware, Antiqq., 186: but this was not a humiliating ceremony.

|| LU, 116, b, 28. ¶ See De Jubainville, La Civil, des Celtes, p. 6 *et seq.*

each other to single combat, called in Irish *Fír cómlainn*, the 'truth of combat,' and *Comrac aen fhir*, 'combat of one man.' Sometimes the duel was resorted to, as among the early English, as a form of ordeal to determine cases, though it is not included in the list of Irish Ordeals.\* Sometimes the pair fought man to man as the result of quarrel and challenge, merely as an affair of valour, on which nothing depended except life.†

If a man who was fully armed and prepared to fight declined to meet an adversary who came up and offered battle, he incurred disgrace and some loss of status.‡ It appears that in very old times, when a hostile force invaded a territory, it was a recognised custom that a champion of the invaded people might offer single combat, which was always accepted; and the invading army were bound to halt till they had found someone to subdue the defending champion. It was by taking advantage of this custom that Cuculainn barred for some time the advance into Ulster of the Connaught army under Ailill and Maive: for he sent challenge after challenge, and killed every man that came to meet him. These combats were always fought at fords, and the combatants most commonly fought standing in the water.§ A deliberate agreement to refer the settlement of any cause or dispute to the issue of single combat was called *cáirde chloidib*, 'agreement of sword,' 'sword-pact.'||

The Brehon Law took careful cognisance of single combats, and laid down stringent rules regarding them. Some combats for deciding causes were designated as legal, some as illegal. If a looker-on reasonably interfered to prevent the fight and got injured, one or both were liable to him

\* See page 303, *infra*.

† See Silva Gad., 414, for a historical example of a challenge and combat. For others, Gwynn, Dind., 19, 59.

‡ Br. Laws, iv. 353.

§ O'Curry, MS. Mat., 37; Man. & Cust., i. 296: De Jubainville, La Civil., 31: Faraday, *passim*.

|| LU, 70, b, 33; 71, a, 3; 72, b, 16,



for damages : if both were fighting legally or both illegally, they paid equal shares ; if one was fighting legally and the other illegally, the illegal combatant paid the larger share. So far as I can make sense of this part of the Book of Aicill, a man fought legally if he had no other mode of settling the case, and illegally if he had.\* The correctness of this interpretation is rendered pretty certain by a passage in another Brehon Law tract (v. 477, <sub>31</sub>), which mentions as a proceeding liable to penalty, “ to proclaim a “ combat [*i.e.* to send a challenge] without offering to “ submit to law.”

Certain formalities, both before and during a single combat, had to be complied with. There should be at least one witness, who, in some respects, corresponded with the seconds in the duel of later times : and an interval of five days should elapse between the challenge and the fight : two wise arrangements. If the combat was to decide a case, it was necessary that each combatant should give verbal security, before the witness or witnesses, that he would abide by the result of the fight in the settlement.†

A typical case of single combat is quoted in the *Senchus Mór*. Two great Red Branch champions, Conall Cernach and Laegaire the Victorious, on one occasion met, quarrelled, and were ready to fight on the spot, in all except the presence of a witness, for whom they were waiting. A woman happened to come up, and, seeing them likely to fall on each other, demanded that the fight should be put off till a witness (a man) was procured. To this both agreed ; but as the length of postponement was not fixed, they had to refer the case to Conobar and his brehon Sencha, who fixed on five days. It would appear that this case regulated all other single combats : so that when two men challenged each other, they had to wait for five days before fighting.‡

\* Br. Laws, III. 237 to 241.

† *Ibid.*, IV. 33, text and Gloss.

‡ *Ibid.*, I. 251.



FIG 66.—Ornament composed from the Book of Kells.

## CHAPTER V

### STRUCTURE OF SOCIETY

#### SECTION I. *Five main Classes of People.*



THE lay people were divided into classes, from the king down to the slave, and the Brehon law took cognizance of all—setting forth their rights, duties, and privileges. The leading, though not the sole, qualification to confer rank was property ; the rank being, roughly speaking, in proportion to the amount.\* These classes were not *castes* ; for, under certain conditions, persons could pass from one to the next above, always provided his character was unimpeachable.

The social subdivision of the people as given in some of the law tracts is very minute and artificial : we may adopt here the broad classification outlined by O'Curry, which has been followed by Dr. Richey, the editor of the third and fourth volumes of the Brehon Laws :† namely, **Five main classes**:—1. Kings of several grades, from the king of the *tuath* or cantred up to the king of Ireland : 2. Nobles, which class indeed included kings : 3. Non-

\* As to rank depending on property, see the Crith Gabhlach and its Sequel in Br. Laws, vol. iv. : and in the same vol., p. 377, lines 32, 33 ; p. 381, l. 20 ; 383, l. 18 ; 387, l. 21 : vol. i., 43, 34, 35 : and O'Curry, Man. & Cust., i. 34.

† O'Curry, Man. & Cust., ii. 25 ; Richey on Br. Laws, iv. cxcix.

noble Freemen with property: 4. Non-noble Freemen without property, or with some, but not sufficient to place them among the class next above: 5. The non-free classes. The first three—Kings, Nobles, non-noble Freemen with property—were the privileged classes; a person belonging to these was an *aire* [arra] or chief. Kings have been treated of in chapter iii.

## 2. *Flaiths or Nobles.*

The Nobles were those who had land as their own property, for which they did not pay rent: they were the owners of the soil—the aristocracy. Part of this land they held in their own hands and tilled by the labour of the non-free classes: part they let to tenants, as will be explained in chapter vii. An *aire* of this class was called a **Flaith** [flah], *i.e.* a noble, a chief, a prince. The *flaiths* or nobles were sharply distinguished from the non-noble class next under them.

There were several ranks of nobles, the rank depending chiefly on the amount of landed property. The *tuath*, as already explained, was under the government of the head noble, who was the *ri* or king; and to him all the other nobles of the *tuath* owed allegiance and tribute. The highest rank of noble, next to the tanist of the king, was the **Aire-forgaill**: he should have at least twenty *saer* tenants and twenty *daer* tenants (see p. 189 below); and he had to answer to the king for the character of the nobles and others under him. He was a high-class magistrate, and presided at the making of covenants, and saw them carried out, in which capacity he was termed *Mac-Nascaire* [Mac Naskera], *i.e.* 'Surety-Man'; and he had 100 armed men to attend on him on all state occasions. One of his functions was to determine the status, privileges, and duties of the several nobles and functionaries about the king's court.

Ranking under the *Aire-forgaill* was the *Aire-tuisi*—‘ front *aire* ’—and next under him the *Aire-ard*—‘ high *aire* ’—each so called in relation to the next rank below, each with a defined amount of property, and with several privileges.

The lowest of the noble classes was the *Aire-desa*, so called from the *des* or fee-simple land for which he received rent. He ranked as an *aire-desa*, provided he possessed the necessary land, and that his father and grandfather had been each an *aire* (Br. Laws, iv. 321). Certain houses, horses, and equipments were prescribed for him as necessary for his rank, and he should have at least five *saer* tenants and five *daer* or *giallna* tenants.

One order of nobles, the *Aire-echta*, who held a military position, has been already treated of (p. 92).\*

### 3. Non-noble Freemen with Property.

A person belonging to the other class of *aire*—a non-noble rent-paying freeman with property (No. 3, above)—had no land of his own, his property consisting of cattle and other movable goods ; hence he was called a *Bo-aire*, i.e. a ‘ cow-chief ’ (*bo*, ‘ a cow ’). He should rent a certain amount of land, and possess a certain amount of property in cattle and other goods, to entitle him to rank as an *aire*. A *bo-aire*, having no land of his own, rented land from a *flaith* or noble, thus taking rank as a *saer-céile* or free tenant (see p. 189, farther on) ; and he grazed his cattle partly on this and partly on the “ commons ” grazing land. He might sublet his rented land to under-tenants. The

\* From the above, and from chap. iii., it will be seen that there were seven grades of *Flaiths* or Nobles :—1, the king : 2, tanist of the king : 3, *aire-forgaill* : 4, *aire-tuisi* : 5, *aire-ard* : 6, *aire-echta* : and 7, *aire-desa*. This is in accordance with what is stated in Br. Laws, iv. 321, lines 11, 12, and with what follows in same vol. on pp. 321, 323, 325, 327 : but there appears some discrepancy in one place between it and the statement in another tract, at p. 347, <sup>22</sup>, where the *Aire-forgaill* is made the same as the *Aire-ard*. See also Br. Laws, v. 25.



*bo-aires* were magistrates, and as such presided in court or at the *aibinn* meetings (see vol. II. pp. 449, 450) in the discharge of some legal functions : and for this they had certain allowances and privileges according to rank (Br. Laws, iv. 309). Among their perquisites were a share in the mill and in the kiln of the district, and fees for witnessing contracts and for other legal functions. There were several ranks of *bo-aires* according to the amount of property.

The **Aire-coisring** or 'binding-chief' was the highest of the *bo-aires*. He was the leader and representative of all his *fině* or kindred, and was expected to be able to give an account of their conduct and obedience to the laws when occasion arose. In case of complaint or accusation he answered for them to the king of the *tuath*, having previously investigated the case (Br. Laws, iv. 317). Hence he was also called the *Aire-fine* [arra-finna] or 'family-chief.'\* This custom continued down to the sixteenth century, and came under the notice of Spenser (View, 54), who calls it *kin-cogish* : and according to him it was transferred to the Anglo-Irish statute book in his own time—during the reign of Elizabeth :—

"Another statute I remember, which having been an auncient Irish custome, is now upon advisement made a law, and that is called the custome of kin-cogish, which is, that every head of every sept, and every chiefe of every kindred or family, should be answereable and bound to bring foorth every one of that sept and kindred under it at all times to be justified, when he should be required or charged with any treason, felony, or other haynous crime."

Spenser's anglicised form *kin-cogish* represents correctly the sound of the Irish name of this custom, *cenn-comhfhoguis*, the 'head of kindred,' from *cenn*, 'head,' and *comhfhogus* [cogus], consanguinity or relationship, gen. *comhfhoguis*, pron. *cogish*.†

The **Fer-fothla** was a rich *bo-aire* who, having more stock than he was able to graze, hired them out as *taurcrec*

\* O'Curry, Man. & Cust., I. 36.

† Br. Laws, I. 106, 107.

to others (*daer-céiles* : see p. 189, farther on), who thus became his dependents. He held a very high position as a member of society and as a magistrate, almost equal to the *Aire-coisring*. If a *Fer-fothla* or an *Aire-coisring* could prove that he had twice as much property as was required for the lowest rank of noble (the *Aire-desa*), and complied with certain other conditions and formalities, and also provided his father and grandfather had been *aires* who owned land, he was himself entitled to take rank as an *Aire-desa* noble.\* The *Brugh-fer*, *Brugaid*, or *Briuga* was an interesting official of the *bo-aire* class : he was a public hospitaller as well as a magistrate : he and his office will be treated of in chapter xxi. (vol. II. p. 168). The lowest in rank of the non-noble *aires* was the *ógaire*, i.e. junior-*aire*, 'from the youngness of his aireship.' Many of these were men who had belonged to the next lower rank of freemen, and who had accumulated sufficient property to qualify them as *óg-aires*.

The three preceding main classes—kings, nobles, and *bo-aires*—were all *aires*, chiefs, or privileged people : the first two being *flaiths* or noble *aires*, the third, non-noble *aires*, i.e. free tenants, with property sufficient to entitle them to the position of *aire*. All three had some part in the government of the country and in the administration of the law, as kings, tanists, nobles, military chiefs, magistrates, and persons otherwise in authority ; and they commonly wore a *flesc* or bracelet on the arm as a mark of their dignity.†

That the classification of chiefs into these various grades was a reality, and that the several ranks were separate and distinct, and universally recognised—as clearly as "Justices of the Peace," "Resident Magistrates," "Deputy Lieutenants," "Lord Lieutenants of counties," &c., are now—is proved by the fact that we often find them incidentally referred to, both in the laws and in

\* Br. Laws, IV. 315, 317.

† Keating, 162.

general literature, as being well known and understood. For instance, in the ancient description of Tara and its *Féis*, quoted by Petrie (Tara, 199, 205) from the Book of Leinster, six of the chieftain classes—namely, Aire-forgaill, Aire-árd, Aire-túisi, Aire-echta, Aire-desa, and Brugaid—are included in the list in which are named the numerous officials in the great banqueting hall.

#### 4. *Non-noble Freemen without Property.*

The next class—the fourth—the freemen with little or with no property, were *céiles* or free tenants. They differed from the *bo-aires* only in not being rich enough to rank as *aires* or chiefs; for the *bo-aires* were themselves *céiles* or rent-payers; and accordingly, a man of the fourth class could become a *bo-aire* if he accumulated property enough: the amount being laid down in the Brehon Law. These *céiles* or tenants, or free rent-payers—corresponding with the old English *ceorls* or churls—formed the great body of the farming class. They were called *aithech*, i.e. ‘plebeian,’ ‘farmer,’ ‘peasant,’ to distinguish them from the *aires* or chieftain grades: and the term *féini* or *féne* [faině], which means much the same as *aithech*, was also applied to them. Some few members of the *féine* were selected by the king to look after the affairs of their immediate district, or what we should now call a townland. “These *féine*”—says the Gloss on the Law (v. 15, 17)—are *brugaid*-farmers, and the stewards of kings.” These are evidently the officers referred to in the record about Ollamh Fodla, king of Ireland (FM, A.M. 3922: see p. 69, *supra*), that he appointed a chief over every *tricha-chéd* and a *brugaid* over every *baile* or townland. These *brugaid*-stewards or *féine*-stewards continued to be appointed and to exercise their functions down to a late time—the time of the glossator of the Laws; but the exact nature of their functions is not known.

The land held by the *féine* or free tenants was either a part of the tribe-land, or was the private property of some *flaith* or noble, from whom they rented it. Everywhere in the literature, especially in the Laws, the *féine* or farming classes are spoken of as a most important part of the community—as the foundation of society, and as the ultimate source of law and authority. The very name of what we now call the Brehon Law was derived from them “Fénechas” or “Féinechas”; so that the several parts of the Brehon Code are constantly referred to as *Dlighthe Féine* [dlee-ha-faině], the ‘Laws of the *Féine*’: and the ancient language in which the Fénechas was written is called *Bér-la-Féine*, i.e. ‘the language of the *Féine*.’\*

The position of the *céiles*, the terms on which they held their farms, and their rights, duties, and obligations, will be explained in some detail in the chapter (vii.) dealing with land. For the land and the *céile* tenants were so intimately mixed up that it would be scarcely possible to treat of them separately.

Any freeborn native was called an *urrad* [urra], a term having much the same meaning as the old English word “yeoman” (see “Urrad” in Atkinson’s Glossary to Br. Laws). Tradesmen formed another very important class of freemen. The greater number belonged to the fourth class—freemen without property. Some crafts were “noble” or privileged, of which the members enjoyed advantages and privileges beyond those of other trades: and some high-class craftsmen belonged to the class *aire* or chief. But the law is not near so detailed in its statement of the position and rights of tradesmen, as of those of tillers of the soil: showing again the great importance attached to land.

\* Br. Laws, I. 117, <sup>24</sup>; 119, last par.; III. 225, <sup>25</sup>. See also Atkinson Glossary to Br. Laws, “Feine” and “Feinechas.”



5. *The Non-free Classes.*

So far we have treated of freemen, that is, those who enjoyed all the rights of the tribe, of which the most important was the right to the use of a portion of the tribe-land and commons. We now come to treat of the non-free classes. The term "non-free" does not necessarily mean servile. The non-free people were those who had not the full rights of the free people of the tribe. They had no claim to any part of the tribe-land, though they were permitted, under strict conditions, to till little plots for mere subsistence. This was by far the most serious of their disabilities. Except under very exceptional circumstances they could not enter into contracts. Yet some justice was done to them; for if a freeman made a forbidden contract with a non-free person, the former was punished, while the non-free man had to be compensated for any loss he incurred by the transaction.\* Their standing varied, some being absolute slaves, some little removed from slavery, and others far above it.

The non-free people were of three classes, who are distinguished in the law and called by different names:—the **Bothach**, the **Senclaithe**, and the **Fudir**. The persons belonging to the first two were herdsmen, labourers, squatters on waste lands, horse-boys, hangers-on, and jobbers of various kinds—all poor and dependent. But they enjoyed one great advantage: they were part of the tribe, though debarred from most of its rights; and consequently they could claim to live within the territory and to support themselves by their labour.

The third class—the *Fudirs*—were the lowest of the three. They were not members of the tribe, and consequently had no right of residence, though they were permitted by the chief to live within the territory, from which, however, they might be expelled at any moment.

\* Br. Laws, II. 289.

A *fudir* was commonly a stranger, a fugitive from some other territory, who had by some misdeed, or for any other reason, broken with his tribe—who had become “kin-wrecked,” as they expressed it in Wales—and fled from his own chief to another who permitted him to settle on a portion of the unappropriated commons land. But men became *fudirs* in other ways, as we shall see. Any freeman might give evidence against a *fudir*: but the *fudir* could not give evidence in reply.\* When a *fudir* obtained a settlement from a *flaith* or lord, he—or his family after him—might leave during the life of that lord and of his two successors, but could take nothing away. But if he or they remained on voluntarily till they came under a fourth lord, they were no longer free to leave: they were bound to the soil—“*adscripti glebæ*.”†

The *fudirs* were of two classes, a higher and a lower, called *saer-fudir*, or free *fudir*, and *daer-fudir*, or bond *fudir*. The *saer-fudirs* were so called, not because they were free-men, which they were not, but to indicate that they were not under the heavy bondage of the lower class. They were those who were free from crime, and who, coming voluntarily into the district, were able to get moderately favourable terms when taking land from the chief. The lord was responsible for his *fudirs*. If a *fudir* or any member of his family committed a crime, the lord had to pay the damage; and, on the other hand, if anyone injured a *fudir*, the compensation was paid to the lord.‡

Some of the *saer-fudir* tenants who accumulated wealth were much better circumstanced than the general body. If there were five of them under one chief, each possessing at least 100 head of cattle, they might enter into partnership so as to answer for each other's liabilities. In this case they enjoyed privileges that put them almost on a level

\* Br. Laws, III. 131, 133 note.

† O'Curry, MS. Mat., 655: Br. Laws, IV. 283 and note 3; V. 513.

‡ Br. Laws, V. 513.

with the *céiles* or free tenants. They had a share in the tribe-land and in the commons : they took stock from the chief, and paid *biatad* or food-rent (for which see p. 191, *infra*). They paid their part of any fines that fell on the sept on account of the crimes of individuals ; they took their share of any property left to the *finè* or sept like the ordinary tenants ;\* and their chief, or representative man, was qualified to be of the rank of *bo-aire*. But these must have been rare exceptions.

The *daer-fudirs*—the lowest and most dependent of all—were escaped criminals, captives taken in battle or raids from other districts or other countries, convicts respited from death, persons sentenced to fine and unable to pay, purchased slaves, &c. Some *daer-fudirs* were mere slaves : and those who were not were little better. Yet their lot was not hopeless : the law favoured their emancipation : a *daer-fudir* could become a *saer-fudir* in course of time under certain conditions. The settlement of *fudirs* was disliked by the community and discouraged by the Brehon law :† for it curtailed the commons land ; and while it tended to lower the status of the tribe, it raised the power of the chief, who in cases of dispute could bring all his *fudirs* into the field. Any social disturbance, such as rebellion, invasion, civil war, &c., in which many were driven from their homes and beggared, tended to increase the number of the *fudirs*. The terms on which the *fudirs* were permitted to till the soil will be told in chapter vii., section 4 (p. 194).

It has been said that some of the lowest of the *fudirs* were downright slaves. That slavery pure and simple existed in Ireland in early times we know from the law-books as well as from history ; and that it continued to a comparatively late period is proved by the testimony of Giraldus Cambrensis, who relates that it was a common

\* Br. Laws, IV. 39, 43 ; V. 515 : Sullivan, *Introd.*, 158.

† Maine, *Anc. Inst.*, 175.

custom among the English to sell their children and other relatives to the Irish for slaves—Bristol being the great mart for the trade. They must have been very numerous in the twelfth century: for at the Synod held in Armagh in 1171, the clergy came to the conclusion that the Anglo-Norman invasion was a curse from heaven as a punishment for the inhuman traffic in slaves: and they anathematised the whole system as “contrary to the right of Christian freedom,” and decreed that all English slaves were free to return to their own country.\* Considering the period and the ideas then prevalent all over the world, this resolution reflects much credit on the Irish ecclesiastical authorities, anticipating by many centuries the action of the various European and American States in decreeing the emancipation of slaves. How far the Irish decree took effect we are not told.

Our own records show that slaves were imported. Thus the Book of Rights (p. 87) states that the king of Ireland paid to the king of Bruree, as part of his *tuarastal*, ten foreign slaves *without Gaelic*, i.e. not able to speak the Gaelic language: a similar entry is found at p. 181; and in several other parts of the same book we find mention of dues paid in bondsmen and bondswomen, “brought over the sea”: but whether from other countries besides Britain is doubtful. Some canons of the ancient Irish Church—much earlier than the time of the Armagh Synod—notice the redemption of slaves.† It appears from a passage in Adamnan (158, 159), as well as from other authorities, that a man whom another ransomed from the penalty of death was to be the ransomer’s slave: and a slave thus ransomed had to wear a special girdle. But persons might become slaves in many other ways. When a pregnant bondswoman was sold, the unborn child was commonly exempted: i.e., while the woman became the

\* Girald., Hib. Exp., i. xviii.

† Ware, Antiqq., 156.



property of the purchaser, the child, when born, belonged to the seller.\* The usual word for a slave was *Mog*, *Mogh*, or *Mug*.

### 6. Groups of Society.

The people were formed into groups of various sizes, from the family upwards. The **Family** was the group consisting of the living parents and all their descendants. The **Sept** was a larger group, descended from common parents long since dead : but this is an imported word, brought into use in comparatively late times. All the members of a sept were nearly related, and in later times bore the same surname. The **Clan** or **house** was still larger. *Clann* means ' children,' and the word therefore implied descent from one ancestor. The **Tribe** (*tuath*) was made up of several septs, clans, or houses, and usually claimed, like the subordinate groups, to be descended from a common ancestor. The adoption of strangers into the family or clan was common ; but it required the consent of the *finè* or circle of near relations—formally given at a court meeting ;† and the persons adopted had not the full rights of ordinary freemen members, especially as regarded land. An adopted person was called *Mac Faosma*, literally ' son of protection.' Sometimes not only individuals, but smaller tribes, who for any reason had migrated from their original home, were adopted ; who were then known as *finè-taccuir*, i.e. ' a family taken under protection.'‡ From all this it will be seen that in every tribe there was much admixture ; and the theory of common descent became a fiction, except for the leading families, who preserved their descent pure and kept a careful record of their genealogy.

\* Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, Pref., cxii.

† Br. Laws, iv. 61, 289 : Sull., *Intro.*, 131.

‡ Br. Laws, iv. 61, 19 ; 63, top ; 285, 25 ; 287, 16 ; 289, last par. For *Faosam*, see *Fc-essam* in Windisch, *Wörterbuch* : *Faosamh* in O'Donovan, *Supplem. to O'R.* : Stokes, *Rev. Celt.*, iii. 97 : see *Tacar* in O'Donovan, *Supplem.* : and *Fine-taccuir* in Atkinson's *Gloss. Br. Laws*.

Thus the tribe became a mere local association of people, occupying a definite district and bound together by common customs, by common interests, by living under one ruler, and in some degree by the fiction of descent from one common ancestor. Each member had to bear his part of the obligations and liabilities of the tribe: for instance, he had to contribute to the support of old people who had no children to take care of them, and the whole sept or *finè* were liable for the fines or debts of any individuals who absconded or were unable to pay. No individual was free to enter into any contracts affecting the tribe; for example, he was restricted by certain conditions when he wished to sell his land.\*

The word *finè* [finna] is loosely applied to almost any subdivision of society, from the tribe in its largest sense down to a small group consisting of members of the same family. In its most usual application it meant a group of persons, related by blood within certain recognised degrees of consanguinity, all residing in the same neighbourhood. The members of a *finè* in this sense had certain rights in common, and were subject to certain liabilities—all according to well-established customs.

When the tribal community comprised a large population occupying an extensive district, it often got the designation **Cinel** [Kinel], still implying—like clan—descent from a common ancestor. Thus the Kinel-Owen, who possessed the principality of Tir-Owen, and were supposed to be descended from Owen, son of Niall of the Nine Hostages, were ruled by one of the O'Neills, and included the septs of O'Cahan, Mac Quillan, O'Flynn, and many others, each governed by a *flaith* or chief who was tributary to O'Neill. The tribe organisation was not peculiar to Ireland; it existed among all the Aryan nations in their early stages.

\* Br. Laws, II. 283; III. 55; IV. 129. On the Mutual Obligations of tribe and individuals, see also Br. Laws, I, 69, 4; 71, 15, 25.



FIG 67.—Ornament on leather case of Book of Armagh. From Petrie's Round Towers.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE BREHON LAWS

#### SECTION I. *The Brehons.*

AW formed a most important factor both in public and private life in ancient Ireland. The native legal system, as briefly outlined in this and the next two chapters, existed in its fulness before the ninth century. It was somewhat disturbed by the Danish and Anglo-Norman invasions, and still more by the English settlement ; but it continued in use till finally abolished in the beginning of the seventeenth century. In these three chapters I merely attempt to give a popular sketch of the main features of the Brehon Laws, devoid of technical legal terms.

In Ireland a judge was called a *brehon*,\* whence the native Irish law is commonly known as the "Brehon Law" : but its proper designation is *Fènechas*, i.e. the law of the *Féine* or *Féne*, or free land-tillers (p. 161, *supra*). According to Cormac's Glossary (p. 12), *aigrere* [3-syll.] is another name for a *brehon*.

The *brehons* had absolutely in their hands the interpretation of the laws and the application of them to individual

\* Irish *brethem*, modern *breitheamh* [brehev] : this takes an *n* in the genitive and dative—*bretheman*, *brethemain*, pron. *brehoon*, from which comes the Anglo-Irish *brehon*.

cases. They were therefore a very influential class of men ; and those attached to chiefs had free lands for their maintenance, which, like the profession itself, remained in the same family for generations. Those not so attached lived simply on the fees of their profession, and many eminent brehons became wealthy. The legal rules as set forth in the Law Books, were commonly very complicated and mixed up with a variety of technical terms ; and many forms had to be gone through and many circumstances taken into account, all legally essential : so that no outsider could hope to master their intricacies. The brehon's fee (*fola*) was **one-twelfth**, *i.e.* presumably one-twelfth of the property in dispute, or of the fine in case of an action for damages.\* He had to be very careful ; for he was himself liable for damages, besides forfeiting his fee, if he delivered a false or an unjust judgment :—"Every judge"—says the Book of Acaill—"is punishable for his neglect : he is to pay eric-fine for his false judgment."† There is no record how the brehons acquired the exclusive right to interpret the laws and to arbitrate between litigants ; it grew up gradually and came down as a custom from times beyond the reach of history. The institution of the brehons, the gradual increase of their authority, the legal processes in which they took part, and the forms of trial for deciding cases between man and man, were in all essential features much the same as those that grew up in the early stages of all the Aryan societies, Germanic, Anglo-Saxon, Danish, Indian, Hellenic, &c., and strongly resembled the procedures followed in archaic Roman law.‡

To become a brehon a person had to go through a regular, well-defined course of study and training. It would appear that the same course qualified for any branch of the legal profession, and that once a man had mastered

\* Brehon's fee : Br. Laws, I. 232, 1 ; 235, 21 ; III. 305, 14 ; 319, 20 ; Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, Pref. cxv. See also p. 199, below.

† Br. Laws, III. 305. ‡ See Br. Laws, iv. ; Richey, *Introd.* xiv, xv.



the course, he might set up as a brehon or judge proper, a consulting lawyer, an advocate, or a law-agent. Besides this special study in technical law, a brehon should qualify as a shanachie or historian ; just as in our day professional students have to qualify in certain literary or scientific subjects not immediately connected with their special lines. In later ages the legal profession tended to become hereditary in certain families, some of whom were attached to kings or chiefs, though all, or at least the high-class members of the profession, had to comply with the conditions as to time and study.—“ No person,” says the *Senchus Mór*, “ is qualified to plead a cause at the high court unless he is skilled in every department of legal science.”\*

In very early times the brehon was regarded as a mysterious, half-inspired person, and a divine power kept watch over his pronouncements to punish him for unjust judgments.—“ When the brehons deviated from the truth of nature, there appeared blotches upon their cheeks.”† The great brehon, Morann, son of Carbery Kinncat (king of Ireland in the first century), wore a *sín* [sheen] or collar round his neck, which tightened when he delivered a false judgment, and expanded again when he delivered the true one. All this agrees with the whole tenor of Irish Literature, whether legendary, legal, or historical, which shows the great respect the Irish entertained for justice pure and simple according to law, and their horror of unjust decisions.‡ It was the same at the most ancient period as it was in the beginning of the seventeenth century, when Sir John Davies, the Irish attorney-general of James I., testified.—“ For there is no nation of people under the sunne “ that doth love equall and indifferent [*i.e.* impartial] “ justice better then the Irish ; or will rest better satisfied

\* Br. Laws, II. 89.

† Br. Laws, I. 25 ; also IV. 9, note 2 ; 15, last par. ; 17.

‡ In illustration of this see also Br. Laws, IV. 53 : and *Clacnfeartha* in O'Grady, *Silva Gad.*, 288 : see also 357, 358, same book.

“ with the execution thereof, although it bee against themselves ; so as they may have the protection and benefit of the law, when uppon just cause they do desire it.”\* But later on the Penal Laws changed all that, and turned the Irish natural love of justice into hatred and distrust of law, which in many ways continues to manifest itself to this day.

The brehons evidently took great pleasure in the study and practice of their profession ; and we frequently find the law designated as “ pleasant and delightful knowledge,”† and such like. There are indications everywhere in the law tracts that they applied themselves diligently to master details and clear up doubtful points : and taking a broad view of the whole subject, as it is presented to us in the books, we cannot avoid concluding that—in the words of Sullivan (Introd., 273)—“ the profession of law appears “ to have been in a singularly advanced stage of organisation for so early a period.”

In the beginning every *filċ* or poet was also a brehon or judge : “ for, from the time that Amergin of the white knee, the poet, delivered the first judgment in Erin, it was to the files or poets alone that belonged the right of pronouncing judgments, until the disputation of the two poets *Ferċertne* and *Neidhe*.”‡ It happened during the reign of Concobar Mac Nessa that these two sages had to argue a point in public, while Concobar himself was present listening ; and their language was so highly technical that neither the king nor the chiefs could understand them ; whereupon the privilege of judicature was taken from the poets and committed to the hands of special judges ; and the legal profession, instead of being confined to the poets, was thrown open to all who could qualify. This tradition probably commemorates a reform at some very early time, by which legal pronouncements came to be expressed in language

\* This is the concluding sentence of Davies’ thoughtful and valuable essay, “ A discoverie of the True Causes.” &c. Davies was an Englishman.

† Br. Laws, IV. 21, 15, 26.

‡ O’Curry, MS. Mat., 45 : Br. Laws, I. 19.

much less technical than before, so that all intelligent persons might understand them.\* Several great lawyers are commemorated in the traditions, among whom, it is worthy of remark, some women are included.

The Brehon Law that applied to all Ireland was called *Cáin* Law, to distinguish it from *Urradus* Law [urra-us], which was a special local law or custom applying only to the province or district where it was in force. It was the business of the brehon to know when to bring a case under the one, and when under the other, and to apply the proper rules in each case.

## 2. *The Senchus Mór and other Books of Law.*

The brehons had collections of laws in volumes or tracts, all in the Irish language, by which they regulated their judgments, and which those of them who kept law-schools expounded to their scholars; each tract treating of one subject or one group of subjects. Many of these have been preserved, and of late years the most important have been published, with translations, forming five printed volumes (with a sixth consisting of a valuable Glossary to the preceding five, by Dr. Atkinson, the editor of the fifth volume). Of the tracts contained in these volumes, the two largest and most important are the **Senchus Mór** [Shanahus More] and the **Book of Acaill** [Ack'ill]. In a popular sense, it may be said that the *Senchus Mór* is chiefly concerned with the Irish civil law, and the *Book of Acaill* with what is now known as the criminal law and the law relating to personal injuries.

In the ancient Introduction to the *Senchus Mór*† the following account is given of its original compilation. In the year 438 A.D. a collection of the pagan laws was made at the request of St. Patrick, and the whole *Fénechas* Code

\* For an example of the legal hard language see Cormac's Glossary, 102, under "Lethech."

† Br. Laws, I. 3 *et seq.*

was expounded to him by Dubthach, the king's chief poet, a zealous Christian convert. *Laegaire* [Leary], king of Ireland, appointed a committee of nine persons to revise them, viz. three kings—*Laegaire* himself, *Corc*, king of Munster, and *Dáire* [Dara] king of Ulster; three ecclesiastics—*Patrick*, *Benen*, and *Cáirnech*; and three poets and antiquarians—*Rossa*, *Dubthach*, and *Fergus*. These nine produced at the end of three years a revised code, which was called *Senchus Mór*—also called *Cáin Patrick* or *Patrick's Law*. This account, with the names of the “nine props of the *Senchus Mór*,” as they are designated, is also given briefly in *Cormac's Glossary*, as well as in the *Book of the Dun Cow* (*Trip. Life*, 565, 571). The Introduction to the *Senchus Mór* goes on to say: “What did not clash with the word of God in the written Law and in the New Testament, and with the consciences of the believers, was confirmed in the laws of the Brehons by Patrick and by the ecclesiastics and the chieftains of Erin [*i.e.* by the committee of nine]: and this is the *Senchus Mór*.”\* Though there are historical difficulties in this account, there seems no good reason to doubt that there was some such revision.

The code produced by the committee contained no new laws: it was merely a digest of those already in use, with the addition of the Scriptural and Canon laws. The statement in the old Introduction is, that before St. Patrick's time the law of nature prevailed, *i.e.* the ancient pagan law as expounded by Dubthach to Patrick: after his time the law of nature and the law of the letter: this latter (the

\* *Br. Law*, I. 17. Of all the missionaries that ever preached to the heathen, I suppose that St. Patrick was about the most broad-minded and tolerant; as is evidenced in the whole story of his life-work. He made allowance for all the prejudices of the native Irish, and never interfered with any of their customs so long as they did not infringe on the tenets of Christianity. He himself indeed followed the native customs wherever he could; yet when he encountered downright pagan beliefs, idolatrous rites, or wickedness in any form, he was determined and fearless, as when he destroyed the idol *Cromm Cruach* (see pages 275, 276), below.



“ Law of the Letter ”) being “ The Patriarchal Law [the Old Testament] and the New Testament.” But the “ Law of the Letter ” evidently included the numerous Canonical rules laid down by Patrick and his successors, which adjusted the relations of the Church to the lay community, all of which were new.\* The commentator of the *Senchus Mór* adds that “ the over-severity of the law was taken “ from it, namely, the old law of retaliation, ‘ an eye for an ‘ eye,’ &c.,” which existed in the Mosaic Law (Lev. xxiv. 19, 20) and in the Irish Law before Patrick’s time: all which was expunged, and the milder law of compensation substituted. But it is probable that this last reform had been gradually coming into use, and was formally confirmed in the *Senchus Mór*.

The very book left by St. Patrick and the others has been long lost. Successive copies were made from time to time, with commentaries and explanations appended, till the manuscripts we now possess were produced. The existing manuscript copies of the *Senchus Mór* consist of:—1. The original text, written in a large hand with wide spaces between the lines: 2. An introduction to the text: 3. Commentaries on the text, in a smaller hand: 4. Glosses or explanations on words and phrases of the text, in a hand still smaller; commentaries and glosses commonly written in the spaces between the lines of the text, but often in the margins. Of these the text, as might be expected, is the most ancient. The language is extremely archaic, indicating a very remote antiquity, though probably not the very language left by the revising committee, but a modified version of a later time.

The *Senchus Mór* is referred to, as a well-known work, in Cormac’s Glossary, written in the end of the ninth or the beginning of the tenth century; and many of its law terms had then become obsolete, and are explained in the Glossary. As showing the substantial identity of the work

\* See also Br. Laws, III. 27 bot., and 29 top.

referred to in this Glossary with the present existing copy of the *Senchus Mór*, it may be mentioned that most of the cases, passages, and terms cited in the Glossary are found in the lately printed text. Another law tract, the *Bretha Nemed* (the 'Laws of the Privileged Classes': from *breth*, judgment, pl. *bretha*; and *nemed*, a person of the higher or chieftain classes), is repeatedly referred to and quoted in the same old Glossary.

The Introduction comes next in point of antiquity; and the Commentaries and Glosses are the least ancient of all. Introduction, Commentaries, and Glosses (such as we have them) were written or copied by different learned lawyers at various times from the beginning of the fourteenth down to the sixteenth century: the language being often much older than the writing. The manuscript copies of the Book of Acaill and of some other law tracts resemble those of the *Senchus Mór*, the original texts being accompanied by Introduction, Commentaries, and Glosses. In the printed volumes all these are translated, and the different sizes of the penmanship are marked by different sizes of type, both in the Irish and in the translation.

It is probable that in very ancient times all laws were in verse.\* This was evidently the case with the original *Senchus Mór*, for we are told by the commentators that at the compilation "Dubthach put a thread of poetry round it for Patrick":† and we know that the archaic pagan code expounded by Dubthach was itself in verse.‡ The old form has to some extent survived in the law tracts, for certain portions of the existing version of the *Senchus Mór* are in verse.

The laws were written in the oldest dialect of the Irish language, called *Béria Féini*, which even at the time was so difficult that persons about to become brehons had to be specially instructed in it. Even the authors of the

\* Maine, *Anc. Inst.*, 14.

† Br. Laws, I. 23, 25.

‡ Br. Laws, I. 39, 10.

Commentaries and Glosses who wrote hundreds of years ago, and were themselves learned brehons, were often quite at fault in their attempts to explain the archaic text: and their words show that they were fully conscious of the difficulty. It will then be readily understood that the task of translating these Laws was a very difficult one, rendered all the more so by the number of technical terms and phrases, many of which are to this day obscure, as well as

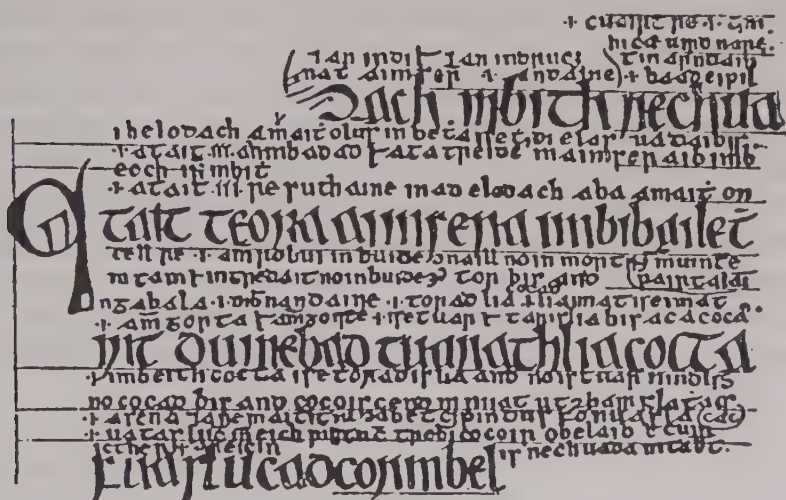


FIG. 68.

Facsimile specimen of the *Senchus Mór*. The four lines of large text are a part of the *Senchus Mór* proper; and they are to be read in the order, second, first, third, fourth. The commentary (*i.e.* the small text) consists of seventeen lines: and, supposing them to be numbered from top to bottom, they are to be read in this way:—Begin at line 8 (which comments on the line of larger text right under it); then 7, 6, 5; part of 4 and part of 3 (both as far as the curve); the rest of 4, the rest of 3; then 2, 1. Resume at 9 and go on in like manner—sometimes upwards, sometimes downwards—to the end: the reader being guided all through by the context.

The whole page of the MS. of which this is a part is given in photographic facsimile in Vol. II. of the *Brehon Laws* (Plate I.); and the above passage will be found printed in proper consecutive order on page 50 of *Br. Laws*, I. (beginning at line 9), with the translation on page 51 (beginning at line 11). No Glosses occur on this Facsimile.

by the peculiar style, which is very elliptical and abrupt—often incomplete sentences, or mere catch-words of rules not written down in full, but held in memory by the experts of the time.

Another circumstance that greatly adds to the difficulty of deciphering these MSS. is the confused way in which

the Commentaries are written in, mainly with the object of economising the expensive vellum. The lines and phrases generally follow each other downwards, but sometimes upwards ; and often a part of a line belongs to one sentence, while the other part has to be picked up after some time from another sentence lower down : and the whole abounds in contractions. The explanatory note under fig. 68 will give some idea of all this.

The two great Irish scholars—O'Donovan and O'Curry—who translated the Laws included in the five printed volumes, were able to do so only after a life-long study ; and in numerous instances were, to the last, not quite sure of the meaning. As they had to retain the legal terms and the elliptical style, even the translation is hard enough to understand, and is often unintelligible. It is, moreover, imperfect for another reason : they did not live to revise it. How the case stands will be understood from the following extract from the last Report (1902) of the Brehon Law Commissioners :—

“ The transcripts [made in the first instance by O'Donovan and O'Curry] occupied seventeen volumes, and employed those engaged on them for several years. A preliminary translation of almost all the ms. tracts which the Commissioners selected for publication was made either by Dr. O'Donovan or by Professor O'Curry ; but unhappily those scholars did not live to complete and revise their translations, which were, in fact, in a great degree, provisional only, imperfections and errors being unavoidable in a first attempt to accomplish what had been regarded by many previous experts as a hopeless task.”

In criticising the work of these eminent men, therefore, scholars will do well to deal with their imperfections and errors tenderly and reverently.

Why the Laws were so often written in this disjointed elliptical style admits of a natural explanation, which may be given in the words of Dr. Atkinson, in his short Preface to the sixth volume of the Laws :—“ The conclusion has



“ been forced upon me by the prolonged study of these documents, that there was a very definite teaching of an *oral* kind (of which the present documents only give us the notes), based upon old traditions of the time when the present extant MSS. were committed to writing.” So that the existing texts of the *Senchus Mór* and other law tracts are in great part what would now be called headings or notes of lectures, a description which anyone who examines them carefully will recognise as correct.

### 3. *Absence of Legislation.*

In all countries a part at least of the law consists of customs that have grown up from the immemorial beginnings of society, corresponding with what is now called “ common law,” never formally enacted, but submitted to by the general body of the people from hereditary habit and under pressure of public opinion. But in countries where the central government has attained sufficient power to take the law into its own hands, there are superadded to these a body of laws specially enacted—statute law as it is now called.

Ireland never arrived at, or at least never seriously entered on, the legislative stage : in other words, no distinct legislative machinery existed : that is to say, a body convened for the purpose of making laws, with authority conferred by the state, and with special officers to enforce obedience—a body like our present parliament. The resistance of the subordinate kings to their nominal superiors, and the resulting constant internecine wars, rendered it impossible for any supreme king to command sufficient power, so that the central government was never strong enough to have much influence either in the making of laws or in causing the existing laws to be carried out. All this prevented the idea of the state from taking root, and the people could not look to it for supreme authority or for protection : much the same as matters stood in England

in the time of the Heptarchy. A central state authority would have been ultimately developed in Ireland if the development had not been at first retarded by civil strife, and finally arrested by the Danish wars and by the Anglo-Norman invasion.

It has been asserted indeed that one of the objects for which the *Féis* of Tara was convened was to enact laws ; but for this assertion—which is often enough repeated—there is no ancient authority. We have very full descriptions of this *Féis*, and also of the proceedings at some of the *Aenachs* or Fair-meetings held elsewhere (chap. xxix.). But though we find it stated over and over again that at these assemblies the laws were publicly “proclaimed,” or “promulgated,” or “rehearsed”—to make the people familiar with them—that they were “revised,” or “re-arranged,” or “re-affirmed”—these several functions being always performed by properly qualified lawyers—there is nowhere any open or plain statement that laws were *made* or *enacted* and sent forth with authority either at the *Féis* or at any of the *Aenachs*. As a matter of fact, O’Curry, though he believed the *Féis* of Tara exercised legislative functions in their widest sense, acknowledges that he was unable to find any record of the enactment of any particular law at these Tara conventions.\*

From the earliest times, however, assemblies were convened to deliberate on public questions. Matters of local and general interest were discussed and arranged, such as taxes, the making and repairing of roads, bridges, causeways, boundaries, the rights of classes or tribes, and such like : but this was not legislation. Yet some of these meetings made an approach to legislative functions ; as, for instance, the synod convened at Tara in 697, where, under the influence of St. Adamnan, the law exempting women from taking part in war was agreed on and promulgated. It is not necessary to quote other examples here : but those who

\* Man. & Cust., i. 29.

wish to study the matter further will find in the footnote\* many other references to records of such assemblies. Meetings of this kind at best bore only a faint resemblance to legislative assemblies; for there existed no authoritative machinery to have the laws carried out, and anyone who chose might refuse to obey them, without subjecting himself to any danger of direct punishment by the state.

But these historical considerations do not go to the bottom of the subject: the real way to determine the question is to examine the Laws themselves. When we do this, we find scarce a trace of any result of legislative action: nothing at all, in fact, resembling statute law. The entire Book of Acaill, which occupies nearly one large volume of the Brehon Laws, and which to some extent corresponds—as has been said—to the present British criminal law, consists, as the book itself states, of Precedents—the legal pronouncements of two learned lawyers, Cormac Mac Art and Cennfaela the learned. As to the *Senchus Mór*, the most important part of the whole Brehon Code, it claims to be merely a revised edition, as already stated, of the old pagan law in use before the time of St. Patrick, of which there is no record, and no indication, that any part was ever enacted by a legislative assembly. To what an extent the judgments of the brehons were regulated by mere precedent or case law is very clearly expressed in Cormac's Glossary (p. 76) under the word *Fasach*:—  
 “Fasach [a precedent or maxim]; *i.e.* the brehon produces  
 “a precedent (*cosmailes*: literally a ‘likeness’) for every  
 “case in which he adjudicates, *i.e.* a case similar (*cosmail*)  
 “to another: and he afterwards repeats the sentence which  
 “wise brehons had passed upon it [*i.e.* upon a case similar  
 “to the case in hands]. Or he follows a good old judgment  
 “for the present case.” So also the Commentary on the

\* Br. Laws, I. 37 (a judgment); 79 & 81 (a judgment); 159, 22: III. 21, last par.; 150, note 2: IV. 227: FM, A.D. 1050 (meeting at Killaloe): O'Curry, MS. Mat., 45, 23: Man. & Cust., I. 30, mid.; and 32, top.

Senchus Mór says that the brehon delivered judgment in public from "the precedents and commentaries."\*

The Brehon Laws, then, are not a legislative structure, but merely a collection of customs attaining the force of law by long usage, by hereditary habit, and by public opinion: customs which were thrown into shape and committed to writing by a class of professional lawyers or brehons. And a similar growth and development of custom-law took place in the early stages of all the Aryan nations.† It is to be observed that after the time of St. Patrick, in the fifth century, Christianity exerted an ever-increasing influence in law as in other institutions; and it is evident from the law-books that, while custom was the main guide of the Brehon lawyers, moral right and wrong obtained more and more consideration in the settlement of cases as time went on.

#### 4. *Suitability of the Brehon Law.*

The Brehon Code forms a great body of civil, military, and criminal law. It regulates the various ranks of society, from the king down to the slave, and enumerates their several rights and privileges. There are minute rules for the management of property, for the several industries—building, brewing, mills, water-courses, fishing-weirs, bees and honey—for distress or seizure of goods, for tithes, trespass, and evidence. The relations of landlord and tenant, the fees of professional men—doctors, judges, teachers, builders, artificers—the mutual duties of father and son, of foster-parents and foster-children, of master and servant, are all carefully regulated. In that portion corresponding to what is now known as criminal law, the various offences are minutely distinguished:—murder, manslaughter, assaults, wounding, thefts, and all sorts of wilful damage; and accidental injuries from flails, sledge-

\* Br. Laws, I. 19, 10.

† Richey, *Introq. to vol. III.*, p. xvii.



hammers, machines, and weapons of all kinds ; and the amount of compensation is laid down in detail for almost every possible variety of injury.

Contracts or covenants are regarded as peculiarly sacred, and are treated in great detail. " There are three " periods of evil for the world "—says the *Senchus Mór*—" the period of a plague, of a general war, and of the dissolution of verbal contracts " ; and again " The world would " be evilly situated if express contracts were not binding."\* But they should be contracts in which both parties were perfectly free : a condition always very clearly kept in view. There were several ways of striking a contract or ratifying a covenant—all very simple. One was by the two parties joining their right hands, which should be first ungloved if gloves were worn.† Sometimes one of the parties put his drinking horn into the hand of the other :‡ a practice anciently common in England, especially in the transfer of lands. Certain legal formulæ were commonly used :—the conditions were to be observed " while the sea surrounds Erin," " so long as the sun and wind remain," &c.§ Important contracts were always witnessed ; and it was usual to give, on each side, persons of standing as securities and guarantees for the fulfilment of contracts or conditions. These persons became liable in case of default. A contract was denoted by the words *cor*, *colach*, and *ernaïdm*.

The Brehon Law was vehemently condemned by English writers ; and in several acts of parliament it was made treason for the English settlers to use it. But these testimonies are to be received with much reserve as coming from prejudiced and interested parties. The laws laid down in the Brehon Code were not, in fact, peculiarly Irish. They were, as has been remarked (p. 181), similar to the ancient laws of all other Aryan tribes, a survival--modified

\* Br. Laws, I. 51 ; III. 3.

† Silva Gad., 114, 27 ; 116, 13 ; 145, 11 : Stokes's *Acallamh*, 324.

‡ Silva Gad., 143, 3. § Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, cxv.

by time and circumstance—of what was once universal.\* We have good reason to believe that the Brehon Law was very well suited to the society in which, and from which, it grew up. This view is confirmed by the well-known fact that when the English settlers living outside the Pale adopted the Irish manners and customs, they all, both high and low, abandoned their own law and adopted the Brehon Code, to which they became quite as much attached as the Irish themselves. The Anglo-Irish lords of those times commonly kept brehons in their service after the manner of the native Irish chiefs: although it was treason for them to do so:† and even the Butlers, who of all the great Anglo-Irish families were least inclined to imitate the Irish, adopted the custom. Many authorities might be cited in proof of all this: but the following passage from an Anglo-Irish State paper of 1537 sets forth the facts as clearly and strongly as could be desired:—

“ MEM.—The statutes of Kilcas [*i.e.* the local Brehon Law of Kilcash in Tipperary, near Clommel] be commonly used in the Country by the lord of Ossory [one of the Butlers], and by his Irish judge called a brehon, and by all other freeholders of the Countrey, and they have none other lawe but the same; and divers of the bookes of the same statutes [*i.e.* ms. books of those parts of the Brehon Law] are in the safe keeping of the shiref of the shire of Kilkenny [the principality of the earls of Ormond, chiefs of the Butlers], and the bishop of Waterford: and one book is in possession of Rory Mac Loughire, being judge [or brehon] of the country.”‡

\* Maine, *Anc. Inst.*, 19.

† Ware, *Antiqq.*, 69 bot., 71 bot.

‡ Quoted by Dr. J. O'Donovan in the Rev. Matthew Kelly's edition of *Cambrensis Eversus*, II. 793.



FIG. 69.—Ornament composed from the Book of Kells.

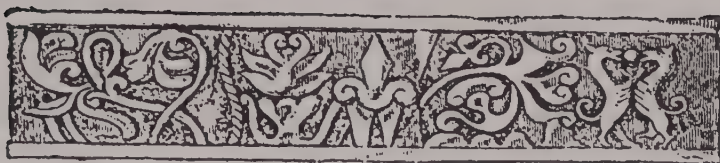



FIG. 70.—Sculpture on Window : Cathedral Church, Glendalough : Beranger, 1799.  
(From Petre's Round Towers.)

## CHAPTER VII

### THE LAWS RELATING TO LAND

#### SECTION I. *The Land originally common Property.*

HE following account of the ancient land laws of Ireland, which has been compiled chiefly from the Brehon Laws, is corroborated in some of its main features by those early English writers who described the native Irish customs from personal observation. It throws much light on the Irish land question of modern times.

In theory the land belonged not to individuals, but to the tribe. The king or chief had a portion assigned to him as mensal land. The rest was occupied by the tribesmen in the several ways mentioned below. The chief, though exercising a sort of supervision over the whole of the territory, had no right of ownership except over his own property, if he had any, and for the time being over his mensal land. It would appear that originally—in prehistoric times—the land was all common property, and chief and people were liable to be called on to give up their portions for a new distribution. But as time went on, this custom was gradually broken in upon ; and the lands held by some, after long possession, came

to be looked upon as private property. As far back as our records go, there was some private ownership in land ; and it is plainly recognised all through the Brehon Laws.\* " All the Brehon writers seem to have a bias towards private, as distinguished from collective, property."† Yet the original idea of collective ownership was never quite lost : for although men owned land, the ownership was not so absolute as at present. A man, for instance, could not alienate his land outside the tribe ; and he had to comply with certain other tribal obligations in the management and disposal of it,‡ all which restrictions were vestiges of the old tribe ownership. But within these limits, which were not very stringent, a man might dispose of his land just as he pleased.

Outside of the Brehon Laws, we do not find much reference to the former common occupation of land. But there are at least two passages which have been noticed by Sir Henry Maine (Anc. Inst., 114) as preserving a dim memory of the old state of things : interesting passages supplied to him by Dr. Whitley Stokes. One is an ancient scholiast's preface in the Book of Hymns (Todd, 132) :— " For the people were very numerous in Erin at that time " [namely, during the reign of the sons of Aed Slaine, A.D. 656 to 664] : and so great were their numbers that the " land could afford but thrice nine ridges [*tri nói immaire* : " meaning here long narrow plots—not hill-ridges] to each " man in Erin : viz., nine of bog, nine of field, and nine of " wood." The other passage is in one of the ancient tales— " The Birth of Cuculainn "—in the Book of the Dun Cow (and copied into that, A.D. 1100, from an earlier ms.). This story relates how, on one occasion, a party of the Red Branch Knights set out southwards from Emain in chariots in pursuit of a flock of enchanted birds : and they

\* Br. Laws, III. 53 ; IV. 69 to 159 : these references given as specimens ; many other passages might be referred to.

† Maine. Anc. Inst., p. 105.

‡ Br. Laws, II. 283 ; III 53, 55.



proceeded across country without difficulty, because, says the story :—" There was neither trench, nor fence, nor " stone wall round land in those days, until there came " the time of the sons of Aed Slaine, but only smooth " fields. Because of the abundance of households in their " time, therefore, it came to pass that they made boundaries " in Ireland."\* Maine remarks it as instructive that, in both passages, the change is referred to an increase of population : and he goes on to express his opinion that this unquestionably represents true history. The common occupation of land is also alluded to in the early *Memoirs* of St. Patrick.†

## 2. *Five ways of holding Land.*

Within historic times the following were the rules of land tenure, as set forth chiefly in the Brehon Laws, and also in some important points by early English writers.‡ The tribe (or aggregate of tribes), under the rule of one king or chief, held permanently a definite district of the country. The tribe was divided, as already described (p. 166), into smaller groups—clans or septs—each of which, being governed by a sub-chief under the chief of the tribe, was a sort of miniature of the whole tribe ; and each clan was permanently settled down on a separate portion of the land which was considered as their separate property, and which was not interfered with by any other clans or septs of the tribe. The land was held by individuals in some one of **five** different ways.

*First.*—The chief, whether of the tribe or of the sept, had a portion as mensal land, for life or for as long as he remained chief (for which, see p. 50, *supra*).

*Second.*—Another portion was held as private property

\* Ir. Texte, i. 136, par. 2 ; and LU, 128, a, 14.

† Trip. Life, p. 337, 26 ; and Introd. clxxv.

‡ For Irish land tenures, see Sull., Introd., 185 *et seq.* ; and for the correspondences between Irish and Teutonic land laws, the same vol., 131 *et seq.*

by persons who had come, in various ways, to own the land. Most of these were *flaiths*, or nobles, of the several ranks ; and some were professional men, such as physicians, judges, poets, historians, artificers, &c., who had got their lands as stipends for their professional services to the chief, and in whose families it often remained for generations. Under this second heading may be included the plot on which stood the homestead of every free member of the tribe, with the homestead itself.

*Third.*—Persons held, as tenants, portions of the lands belonging to those who owned it as private property, or portions of the mensal land of the chief—much like tenants of the present day : these paid what was equivalent to rent—always in kind. The term was commonly seven years, and they might sublet to under-tenants.

*Fourth.*—The rest of the arable land, which was called the **Tribe-land**—equivalent to the *folc* or folk land of England—forming by far the largest part of the territory, belonged to the people in general—the several subdivisions of it to the several septs—no part being private property.\* This was occupied by the free members of the sept, who were owners for the time being, each of his own farm. Every free man had a right to his share, a right never questioned. Those who occupied the tribe-land did not hold for any fixed term, for the land of the sept was liable to gavelkind (p. 197, below) or redistribution from time to time—once every three or four years.† Yet they were not tenants at will, for they could not be disturbed till the time of gavelling ; even then each man kept his crops and got compensation for unexhausted improvements ; and though he gave up one farm, he always got another.

*Fifth.*—The non-arable or waste land—mountain, forest, bog, &c.—was **Commons-land**. This was not appropriated by individuals ; but every free man had a right

\* Br. Laws, III. 17, 53 ; Ware, *Antiqq.*, 72, top.

† Davies, *Disc.* : Letter to Lord Salisbury, ed. 1787, p. 279.

to use it for grazing,\* for procuring fuel, or for the chase. There was no need of subdividing the commons by fences, for the cattle grazed over it without distinction. The portion of territory occupied by each clan or sept commonly included land held in all the five ways here described.

Between common clan ownership on the one hand, and private ownership by individuals on the other, there was an intermediate link; for in some cases land was owned by a family, though not by any individual member, and remained in the same family for generations. This was often the case with land granted for professional services. A very remarkable and peculiar development of family ownership was what was known as the **Gelfine** system, under which four groups of persons, all nearly related to each other, held four adjacent tracts of land as a sort of common property, subject to regulations, then well recognised, but now hard enough to understand.†

It should be observed that the individuals and families who owned land as private property were comparatively few, and their possessions were not extensive: the great bulk of both people and land fell under the conditions of tenure described under the fourth and fifth headings.

### 3. *Tenants : their Payments and Subsidies.*

Every tribesman had to pay to his chief certain subsidies according to his means. Those who held portion of the tribe-land, and who used the commons land for grazing or other purposes, paid these subsidies of course; but beyond this they had no rent to pay to any individual for land held or used under the categories *four* and *five* described above. The usual subsidy for commons pasturage was in

\* How commons land was used for grazing will be described in chap. xxiii., vol. II., (p. 282).

† On the Gelfine system: see Br. Laws, iv., Intro. L.; 41, last par. and note 2; 43; 63, 3; 249, 20; 269, 18; 287, note 4; 289, notes 1 and 2; 293, 7: Joyce, Short Hist. of Irel., 69: and Seebohni, Tribal Custom, p. 76.

the proportion of one animal yearly for every seven,\* which was considerably less than a reasonable rent of the present day. Probably the subsidy for tillage-land was in much the same proportion. Every person who held land shared the liabilities of the tribe; for instance, he was liable to military service,† and he was bound to contribute to the support of old people who had no children.‡

The tribesman who placed himself under the protection of a chief, and who held land, whether it was the private property of the lessor or a part of the general tribe-land, was, as already explained, a **Céile** [cail'eh] or tenant; also called *féině* and *aithech*, i.e. a plebeian, farmer, or rent-payer. But a man who takes land must have stock—cows and sheep for the pasture-land, horses or oxen to carry on the work of tillage. A small proportion of the *céiles* had stock of their own, but the great majority had not. Where the tenant needed stock it was the custom for the chief to lend him as much as he wanted at certain rates of payment. A man might hire stock from the king or a chief, or from a noble, or from some rich *bo-aire*. It often happened that an intermediate chief who gave stock to tenants took stock himself from the king of the territory. This custom of giving and taking stock on hire was universal in Ireland; and it gave rise to a peculiar set of social relations which were regulated in great detail by the Brehon Law.

The *céiles* or tenants were of two kinds, according to the manner of taking stock:—**Saer-céiles**, or free tenants, and **Daer-céiles**, or bond tenants—the latter also called **giallna** [geelna: g hard] tenants. A *saer* [sare] tenant was one who took stock without giving security—nothing but a mere acknowledgment (Br. Laws, II. 195). Stock given in this manner was **saer-stock**, and the tenant held by **saer tenure**. A *daer* tenant was one who gave security for his

\* Br. Laws, III. 129; IV. 305.

† *Ibid.*, IV. 19, 41.

‡ *Ibid.*, II. 283.



stock : his stock was **daer stock** ; and he held by **daer tenure**. The *saer* tenants were comparatively independent, and many of them were rich : as, for instance, the *bo-aïres*, who were all *saer* tenants to kings, chiefs, or nobles. The payments *saer* tenants had to make were reasonable. Not so the *daer* tenants : they had to pay heavily, and were generally in a state of dependence. Their position was much the same as that of needy persons of our own day, who are forced to borrow at usurious interest. More stock was given to a man in *daer* tenancy than in *saer* tenancy. It was of more advantage to the chief to give *daer* stock than *saer* stock (Br. Laws, II. 211, 213).

When a man took *daer* stock, he had to do so openly, without any concealment ; and his *Finè* [*finna*]*—i.e.* his family, including all his sept or kindred within certain degrees of relationship—might if they pleased veto the whole transaction (Br. Laws, II. 217). From this it would appear that *daer* tenancy was viewed with disfavour by the community, for the reason, no doubt, that it tended to lower the status of the tribe.\* There was a sharp distinction between the two orders of tenants, the *daer* tenants being very much the lower in public estimation. When the chief gave evidence in a court of law against his tenants, the *saer* tenants were privileged to give evidence in reply, but the *daer* tenants were not (Br. Laws, II. 345). A *daer* or bond tenant was so called, not that he was a slave or an unfree person, but because by taking *daer* stock he forfeited some of his rights as a freeman, and his heavy payments always kept him down.

The ordinary subsidy owed by a *saer* tenant to his chief was called **Bes-tigi** [*bess-tee*] or house tribute, varying in amount according to his means or the extent of his land : it consisted of cows, pigs, bacon, malt, corn, &c. He was also bound to give the chief either a certain number of days' work, or service in war.† For whatever *saer* stock

\* Maine, *Anc. Inst.*, 163.

† Br. Laws, II. 195 ; III. 19, 2, 8 ; 495.

he took he had to pay one-third of its value yearly for seven years, at the end of which time the stock became his own property without further payment.\* This was equivalent to thirty-three per cent, per annum for seven years to repay a loan with its interest—a sufficiently exorbitant charge. He also had to send a man at stated times to pay full homage to the chief. The labour and the homage are designated in the laws as the worst or most irksome of the *saer* tenant's obligations (Br. Laws, II. 195).

A *daer* tenant had to give war-service (Br. Laws, III. 495) and work. But his chief payment was a food-supply called *Biatad* [bee'ha] or food-rent—cows, pigs, corn, bacon, butter, honey, &c.—paid twice a year. The amount depended chiefly on the amount of *daer* stock he took (II. 229), and probably varied according to local custom. At the end of his term he had, under ordinary circumstances, to return all the stock or its equivalent (II. 223). But if the chief died at the end of seven years, the tenant, provided he had paid his food-rent regularly, kept the stock (II. 269). The *daer* tenants were the principal purveyors of the chief, who could be sure of a supply of provisions all the year round for his household and numerous followers, by properly regulating the periods of payment of his several tenants. This custom is described by several English writers as existing in their own time, so late as the time of Elizabeth.

The *daer* tenants were bound to give *coinmed* [coiney], or refection, on visitation—that is to say, the chief was entitled to go with a company to the *daer* tenant's house, and remain there for a time varying from one day to a month, the tenant supplying food, drink, and sanctuary or protection from danger.† The number of followers and the time, with the quantity and quality of food and the extent of protection, were regulated by law according to

\* Br. Laws, II. 195, 197, 199, 203.

† *Ibid.*, II. 20, note 2 ; 233 ; III. 19.

the tenant's amount of *daer* stock (Br. Laws, III. 21), and according to the rank of the guest : the higher the rank the longer the time (II. 20, note 2). The protection might be relinquished either wholly or partly for an increase of food and drink or *vice versa* (II. 21). Sometimes soldiers, in lieu of regular pay, were sent among the tenants, from whom they were entitled to receive *buannacht* or *bonaght*, *i.e.* money, food, and entertainment : an eminently evil custom. The refectation and *bonaght*, which were by far the most oppressive of the *daer* tenant's liabilities, seem to have been imposts peculiar to Ireland. The *daer* tenants were subject to several other duties, which came at irregular intervals ; and in time of war the chief usually imposed much heavier tributes than at other times upon all the tenants. Sometimes *saer* tenants were liable to coiney : and occasionally a church was under an obligation to supply a night's coiney to the chief at certain intervals, such as once a quarter.\* But besides this, the superior chief, when on his visitations, was to be entertained free by his subordinate chiefs.† Kings, bishops, and certain classes of chiefs and professional men were also entitled to free entertainment when passing through territories, with the proper number of attendants.‡ And it appears that when certain officials met to transact public business, the tenants, both *saer* and *daer*, had to lodge and feed them (III. 21). If either the chief or the tenant fell into poverty, provision was made that he should not suffer by unjust pressure from the other party : " No one," says the law-book, " should be oppressed in his difficulty " (II. 339).

The *daer* tenants were by far the most numerous ; and accordingly this system of the chief stocking the farms was very general. It has often been compared to the *métayer* system, still found in some parts of France and Italy,

\* Misc. Ir. Arch. Soc., 1846, p. 143.

† HyF, 209.

‡ Br. Laws, IV. 347, 349, 351.

according to which the landlord supplies land, stock, and utensils, and receives half the produce.

The text of the Laws gives no information regarding the circumstances that led some to become *saer* tenants and others *daer* tenants ; and the whole subject is involved in considerable obscurity. But a careful study of the text will enable one to gather that this is probably how matters stood. All who took land had to pay the chief certain subsidies—as we have said—independently of what they had to pay for stock. Those who chose to become *saer* tenants did so because they had stock of their own, either quite or nearly sufficient ; and they took stock in small quantity to make up the amount they needed. The *daer* tenants, on the other hand, were poor men who had to take all their stock—or nearly all—on hire ; and they had to give security because they were poor, and because they took such a large quantity. In their case the subsidies for land and the payments for stock are in the Laws commonly mixed up so as to be undistinguishable.

The power, wealth, and influence of a chief depended very much on the amount of stock he possessed for lending out : for besides enriching him, it gave him all the great advantage over his tenants which the lender has everywhere over the borrower. This practice was so liable to abuse that the compilers of the Brehon Code attempted to protect borrowing tenants by a multitude of precise detailed rules. Sir Henry Maine considers that the payments made by the Irish tenants for stock developed in time into a rent payment in respect of land.

Very careful provisions—penalties in the shape of heavy compensation payments—are laid down in the Laws to prevent either the chief or the tenant—whether in *saer* or *daer* tenancy—from terminating the agreement in an arbitrary fashion, as well as to protect each against any neglect or misconduct on the part of the other.\* The tenure of

\* Br. Laws, II. 313 *et seq.*



all was therefore secure, in whatever way they held their lands.

Though the custom of visiting tenants' houses for coiney or refection was carefully safeguarded in the Brehon Law, it was obviously liable to great abuse. In imitation of the Irish, the Anglo-Irish lords adopted the custom of Coyne and Livery,\* which they commonly levied from the English settlers, and committed such excesses—far beyond any abuses of the native chiefs—that they almost ruined the settlement by it.†

#### 4. *Fudirs or Serfs on the Land.*

The social position of *fudirs*, *saer* and *daer*, has been already explained (p. 162). The *saer-fudirs* were permitted to take land from year to year; and they could not be disturbed till the end of their term. Allowance had to be made to them for unexhausted improvements, such as manure. As they were permitted a settlement by the grace of the chief, they were reckoned a part of the chief's *finè* or family (Br. Laws, iv. 283), though they were not members of the tribe. Outside these small privileges, however, they were tenants at will. It would seem indeed that the chief might demand almost anything he pleased from a *fudir* tenant, and if refused might turn him off (III. 131). But the *daer-fudirs* were in a still worse position. If a *daer-fudir* took land, it did not belong to him during occupation (III. 131); he was merely permitted to till it—he was a tenant at will, having no right whatever in his holding. He was completely at the mercy of the chief, who generally rackrented him so as to leave barely enough for subsistence. The *daer-fudirs*, after a certain period of residence (p. 163, *supra*), belonged to the land

\* Coyne and livery—food for man and horse. Coyne is the Irish *coinnmed* or *coiney*; *livery* is French—'food for horse.'

† For coyne and livery and its abuses, see Ware, *Antiqq.*, chap. xii. and Joyce, *Short Hist. of Irel.*, 78.

on which they were settled, and could not leave it. The land kept by a *flaith* or noble in his own hands was commonly worked by *daer-fudirs* : and none but a noble could keep them on his estate.

Spenser, Davies, and other early English writers speak of the Irish tenants as in a condition worse than that of bondslaves, and as taking land only from year to year. No doubt, the tenants they had in view were the *fudirs*, who must have been particularly numerous during the Irish wars of Elizabeth (p. 164, *supra*). It is evident from the Brehon Law that the *fudirs* were a most important class on account of their numbers ; for as they tended to increase in the disturbed state of the country from the ninth century down, they must ultimately have formed a very large proportion of the population.

Sometimes a whole tribe, for one reason or another, came to be in such a state of dependence or serfdom as to approach slavery. They were commonly a tribe who had been expelled from their homes by stronger settlers or invaders, and who, seeking a place of settlement from a strange chief, were received by him under hard conditions. Such a tribe was usually designated *daer-thuath* [dair-hooa], *i.e.* 'bond-tribe,' corresponding with '*daer-chéile*' as applied to an individual (p. 189, *supra*) : often called in English 'enslaved tribe,' but the people were really not slaves. They were subject to heavy tributes, and had to execute certain works, such as building, road-repairing, &c., without payment, for the chief of the district, and they were looked upon as inferiors by the people among whom they settled.

The ancient rights of the tenants, *i.e.* of the *céiles* or freemen, as may be gathered from the preceding part of this chapter, were chiefly three :—A right to some portion of the arable or tribe-land, and to the use of the commons : a right to pay no more than a fair rent, which, in the absence of express agreement, was adjusted by law :\*

\* Br. Laws, I. 159 ; II. 317 ; III. 127.

right to own a house and homestead, and (with certain equitable exceptions) all unexhausted improvements.\* Unless under special contract, in individual cases, the *fudirs* had no claim to these—with this exception, however, that the *sacr-fudirs* had a right to their unexhausted improvements. Among the freemen who held the tribe-land there was no such thing as eviction from house or land, for there was a universal conviction that the landlord was not the absolute owner, so that all free tenants had what was equivalent to fixity of tenure. If a man failed to pay the subsidy to his chief, or the rent of land held in any way, or the debt due for stock, it was recovered like any other debt, by the processes described in next chapter, never by process of eviction.†

### 5. *Descent of Land.*

In Ireland the land descended in three different ways.

*First*, as **private property**.—When a man had land understood to be his own, it would naturally pass to his heirs‡—*i.e.* his heirs in the sense then understood, not necessarily in our sense of the word; or he might if he wished divide it among them during his life—a thing that was sometimes done. In the Tripartite Life of St. Patrick (109, III), we find cases of the sons inheriting the land of their father. There appears in the Brehon Law a tendency to favour descent of land by private ownership: “The Brehon Law writers seem to me distinctly biassed in favour of the descent of property in individual families.”§ It should be remarked that those who inherited the property inherited also the liabilities.||

*Second*.—The land held by the chief as mensal estate descended, not to his heir, but to the person who succeeded

\* Brehon Laws, IV. 133, 135, 137.

† *Ibid.*, I. 123, 157, 159, 169, 187, 215, 217, 219, 231, 233.

‡ *Ibid.*, III. 399; IV. 45, 69.

§ Maine, *Anc. Inst.*, 193.

|| Br. Laws, III. 399-405; IV. 45.

him in the chiefship. This is what is known as descent by **Tanistry**.

*Third, by Gavelkind.*—When a tenant who held a part of the tribe-land died, his farm did not go to his children: but the whole of the land belonging to the *finè* or sept was redivided or *gavelled* among all the male adult members of the sept—including the dead man's adult sons—those members of the sept who were illegitimate getting their share like the rest.\* The domain of the chief, and all land that was private property, were exempt. The redistribution by gavelkind on each occasion extended to the clan or sept—not beyond. Davies complains, with justice, that this custom prevented the tenants from making permanent improvements.†

Davies asserts that land went by only two modes—Tanistry and Gavelkind: but both the Laws and the Annals show that descent by private ownership was well recognised.

The two customs of Tanistry and Gavelkind formerly prevailed all over Europe, and continued in Russia till a very recent period; and Gavelkind, in a modified form, still exists in Kent. They were abolished and made illegal in Ireland in the reign of James I.; after which land descended to the next heir according to English law.

\* Davies, *Discoverie*, ed. 1747, p. 169; *Br. Laws*, iv. 7, 9.

† Letter to Lord Salisbury, ed. 1787, p. 280.



FIG. 70.—Ornament composed from the Book of Kells.





FIG. 71.—Sculpture on a Capital of the Church of the Monastery, Glendalough. Beranger, 1779. (From Petrie's *Round Towers*, 258.)

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

#### SECTION I. *The Law of Compensation.*



ANCIENT Ireland, as has been already explained, the state had not attained sufficient strength and authority to make laws and to see them carried out. There was accordingly no offence against the state, and the state did not prosecute.

Every offence was against the individual—what lawyers call a “tort,” as distinguished from an offence against the state, which is technically called a “crime,” and on the injured party or his friends devolved the duty of seeking redress. If a man is assaulted or murdered nowadays, it is the duty of the magistrates and police—whether friends intervene or not—to bring the offender to justice. But in Ireland in those times there were no police, and a man might waylay or kill another, or set fire to a house, or steal a horse, and still go scot-free, unless the injured person or his friends took the matter in hand. But we must not suppose from this that a lawless state of things existed, or that evil-disposed persons could do as they pleased. The laws suited the times, and aggrieved persons and their

friends, as we may well suppose, were always sharp enough to exact compensation or punishment for injuries, just as they are at the present day in cases where the state will not, or cannot, move ; so that injustice and evil deeds of every kind were in fact kept in check, to all intents and purposes, as well as they are now. A state of things similar to all this existed among the Anglo-Saxons, as well as among all early Aryan communities.\*

In very early times, beyond the reach of history, the **law of retaliation** prevailed—"an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth"—in other words, every man or every family that was injured might take direct revenge on the offender. But this, being found inconsistent with the peace and well-being of the community—especially in cases of homicide, which were frequent enough in those days—gradually gave place to the **law of compensation**, which applied to every form of injury. That this general system of compensation for wrongful acts was at least reasonably effectual is evident from the fact that it was the custom among all the early Aryan tribes.† "In most early codes with which we are acquainted the idea of compensation predominates over that of the duty of revenge."‡ In Ireland the process was this :—The injured party, having no civil authority to appeal to, might at once, if he chose, take the law into his own hands. But though this was sometimes done, public sentiment was decidedly against it, and the long-established custom was to refer all such matters to the arbitration of a brehon. Accordingly, the person injured sued the offender in proper form, and if the latter responded, the case was referred to the local brehon, who decided according to law. The penalty always took the form of a fine—to be paid to the family injured—no other punishment was prescribed by a brehon (see below, p. 213, 9)—and the brehon's fee was usually paid out of this fine (p. 169, *supra*).

\* Student's Hist. of Engl., by S. R. Gardiner, ed. 1892, p. 32.

† Br. Laws, III., Richey, Introd., cxxi. ‡ Richey, Introd., lxxxii.

2. *Procedure by Distress.*

If the offender refused to submit the case to the usual tribunal, or if he withheld payment after the case had been decided against him, or if a man refused to pay a just debt of any kind—in any one of these cases the plaintiff or the creditor proceeded by **Distress** (Irish *Athgabáil*) ; that is to say, he *distrained* or seized the cattle or other effects of the defendant. Due notice had to be given, but no other legal preliminary—no permission from, or reference to, any court or other higher authority—was necessary : the plaintiff resorted to distress on his own responsibility. We will suppose the effects to be cattle. There was generally an **anad** or stay of one or more days on the distress ; that is, the plaintiff went through the form of seizing the cattle, but did not remove them (Br. Laws, III. 327). The defendant had, however, to give a pledge—usually valuable goods, but sometimes his son or other family member—to the plaintiff, who took it away and retained it till the end of the stay, when he returned it on the distrained cattle being formally handed over to him. If the defendant refused to give a pledge, then there was no stay ; it was an **immediate distress**, and the cattle were taken on the spot. During the stay the cattle remained in the possession of the defendant or debtor, no doubt to give him time to make up his mind as to what course to take, viz. either to pay the debt or to have the case tried before the brehon : but the plaintiff had all the time a claim on them.

If at the end of the stay the defendant did not give up the cattle or pay the debt, the plaintiff kept the pledge, which he then might dispose of as he would the distress :\* he might keep the goods or sell the person into slavery. If the debt was not paid at the end of the lawful stay, the plaintiff, in the presence of certain witnesses, removed the

\* Br. Laws, I. 209, 211.

animals and put them in a pound.\* If a chief took cattle in distress, he might legally keep them during detention time in the *faithche* or green of his own homestead, which in such a case constituted a pound, instead of sending them to the public pound. Animals might be impounded on other occasions besides distress, such as for trespass. For the reception and detention of cattle impounded for any cause, there were in every *tuath* or district seven different pounds, each attached to the residence of a chief or of an ollave of some class,† who of course received a compensation fee for sheltering and feeding the animals. To be permitted to keep a pound was accordingly a valuable privilege. Some pounds are designated as lawful (*dlighthigh*), and some as unlawful (*indlighthigh*). "Lawful" pounds were those recognised by law, *i.e.* having some sort of registration: an "unlawful" pound meant one that had no such recognition—probably kept by persons on their own account.‡ "Unlawful," here does not mean contrary to law, but simply unrecognised or unregistered. The distinction was important; for if an accident occurred, as, for example, if a cow broke her leg in a pound, the person taking the distress was liable for the damage if it happened to be an unlawful pound: but he was free from liability if the pound was lawful. Some lawful pounds were called *mainner* and some *forus* (Br. Laws, II. 11), which were still further classified: and *gobhang* appears to have been a general name for a cattle-pound. The animals were not to be mixed: each species should have a separate compartment or pound; and diseased animals were to be separated from those that were sound. Proper provision had to be made for feeding and sheltering impounded cattle.§

In all cases of impending distress the following "three" things are to be announced at the residence of the defendant, *i.e.* the debt for which it [the distress] was taken,

\* Br. Laws, I. 289, 291.

† *Ibid.*, I. 293, top: II. 11, 13.

‡ *Ibid.*, II. 5, last par.: 11, top line. § *Ibid.*, I. 269, 305; II. 11.



“ the pound in which it was put, the law agent by whom it “ was taken ” (I. 269). The animals remained in the pound for a period called a *dithim*, during which the expense of feeding and tending was paid out of the value of the cattle.\* At the end of the *dithim* they began to be forfeited to the plaintiff at a certain rate per day, till such a number became forfeited as paid both the debt and the expenses.† The length of the *anad* and of the *dithim* was regulated by law according to circumstances. There was no stay—*i.e.* the distress was immediate—when it was taken by a chief from one of a lower grade, and also in certain other obvious cases (as when the creditor was likely to abscond) : in some cases, also, notice was not necessary. In immediate distress the cattle were removed at once to the pound. If after the plaintiff had given due notice the defendant absconded, his *finè* [finna] or kindred were liable.‡

The defendant or debtor might prevent the removal of the cattle at the beginning, or might get them back up to the end of the *dithim*, by either paying the debt and expenses, or giving a pledge that he would submit the case for trial, if it had not been tried already. Goods of any kind might be taken in distress, or a man himself, if there were no goods ;§ but the distress, was most generally in cattle. Much formality was observed in all these proceedings ; and the distrainer had to be accompanied by his law-agent and seven witnesses (Br. Laws, I. 291), who should be able to testify that there was a distress, and that it was carried out in exact accordance with legal rules.

We know that fictions form an important part of all laws both ancient and modern : and many are to be found in the Brehon Law : all, however, like those in other codes, being traces or representations of what had once been real transactions. In the cases of some distresses with stay, the fictitious observances — without which the distress

\* Br. Laws, I. 211 ; III. 327.

† *Ibid.*, I. 265, 287.

‡ *Ibid.*, I. 103 ; III. 327.

§ *Ibid.*, I. 105, 107, 271, 4 : II. 41.

would not be legally complete—were very curious. Thus, when barren cattle were distrained, a stone was thrown over them thrice before witnesses (like the legal fiction mentioned by Gibbon\* as practised by the ancient Romans :—" a work was prohibited by casting a stone "). If hens were distrained, a little bit of withe was tied on their feet, and their wings were clipped ; if a dog, a stick was placed across his trough to prohibit feeding ; if an anvil, a little withe was tied on it to prohibit its use ; if carpenters' or shield-makers' tools, a little withe-tie was put on them ; if distress was on religious orders, a withe-tie was put on their bell-house or at the foot of the altar—a sign that they were not to be used ; and so forth.† After these formalities it was understood that, though the defendant was allowed to keep the things, he was not to make use of them meantime.

The object of a distress was either to recover a debt or to force a reference to a brehon : it appears to have been the almost universal way of bringing about the redress of wrong (Br. Laws, I. 257). Heavy penalties were incurred by those who distrained unjustly or contrary to law.‡ Distress should be taken " between sunrise and sunset " : except in cases of urgent necessity, it should not be taken at night (Br. Laws, I. 105). The Irish proceedings by distress were almost identical with the corresponding provisions of the ancient Roman Law, as well as of those of all the early Aryan nations.§ The law of distress is given in great detail, and occupies a large part—186 pages of Irish type—of the *Senchus Mór*.

Suppose now the defendant defied all the proceedings of the plaintiff—a course, however, which very few ventured on, partly on account of the danger, and partly for the reasons stated below (p. 204) : but if he did, since

\* *Decline and Fall*, c. 44.

† Br. Laws, II. 119, 121.

‡ Br. Laws, II. 71 ; III. 147.

§ *Ibid.*, III., Richey, *Introd.*, cxxxvi-vii : *Maine, Anc. Inst.*, 282.

there was no state intervention to enforce obedience, the injured person might take the law into his own hands, and fall back on the old rule of direct retaliation.\* All this, as already observed, resembled the procedure that grew up among the early Aryan people of all nationalities.

This brings us to make an observation on an important point. Three principles, which have been already separately enunciated, were long and deeply embedded in the Brehon Law, viz. :—That every free man had a right to a portion of the land to enable him to subsist, the deprival of which constituted a grievous injustice : that if a free tenant failed to pay his rent or subsidy, it was recovered like any other debt—never by process of eviction (p. 196, *supra*) : and that the duty of inflicting punishment for wrong devolved by right on the injured person where all means of obtaining redress from the culprit failed. Customs that have grown up slowly among a people during more than a thousand years take long to eradicate. They subsist as living forces for generations after their formal abolition ; and the unconscious instinctive hereditary memory of these three principles will go far to explain the tendency to personal acts of vengeance witnessed in Ireland down to recent times in cases of eviction from houses and lands.

### 3. *Procedure by Fasting.*

In some cases before distress was resorted to, a curious custom came into play :—the plaintiff “ **fasted** on ” the defendant ; and this process, called *troscad*, ‘ fasting,’ was always necessary before distress when the defendant was of chieftain grade and the plaintiff of an inferior grade (Br. Laws, I. 113). It was done in this way. The plaintiff, having served due notice, went to the house of the

\* Maine, *Anc. Inst.*, 171. For more information on the subject of Procedure by Distress, the reader is referred to this last-mentioned work ; to Sir S. Ferguson’s Paper in *Trans. R. I. Acad.*, xxiv. 83 ; and to M. D’Arbois de Jubainville, *Rev. Celt.*, vii., pp. 20-31.

defendant, and, sitting before the door, remained there without food. It may be inferred that the debtor generally yielded before the fast was ended, *i.e.* either paid the debt or gave a pledge that he would settle the case. If the creditor continued to fast after an offer of payment, he forfeited all the debt due to him.\* Fasting, as a mode of enforcing a right, is mentioned in the "Tripartite" and other Lives of St. Patrick; and Patrick himself—as related in these—fasted against several persons to compel them to do justice.† From some passages it would appear that the debtor was bound to remain fasting as long as the creditor or complainant fasted. This fasting process was regarded with a sort of superstitious awe; and it was considered outrageously disgraceful for a defendant not to submit to it:—"He that does not give a pledge to fasting "is an evader of all: he who disregards all things shall "not be paid by God or man" (Br. Laws, I. 113). Moreover, if the case went against him, he had to pay double the original claim.

In this country fasting appears to have been resorted to for three purposes:—

*First*: as part of a legal process to obtain redress, as described above.

*Secondly*: to bring some evil on a person. Thus, we are told that, on the eve of a battle, St. Caimin of Inishcaltra fasted against King Guaire of Aidhne, one of the two contending kings, who, in consequence, was defeated in the battle.‡ It appears that if the fasting was unjust, the intended victim might fast in opposition;§ and it was thought that thereby—having the righteous cause—he might either mitigate or wholly avert the evil, something like vaccination against small-pox. Sometimes it happened

\* Br. Laws, I. 119; II. 65.

† Trip. Life, CLXXVII. 219, 419, 557, and 560 note.

‡ Silva Gad., 433: see also Adamn., liv. note w.

§ Silva Gad., 71-2-3; 442.



that the two kept fasting against each other, till one fell into the mistaken belief—or was trapped into it—that the other was eating, and took to eating also, giving an advantage to his opponent, who thus gained his point.

*Thirdly* : fasting was used as a sort of compulsion—like a *geis* (for which see p. 312, *infra*)—to obtain a request from another (Féilire, 75, note 20). The Leinstermen on one occasion fasted on St. Columkille till they obtained from him the privilege that an extern king should never prevail against them (Silva, 417) : Amergin Mac Aulay fasted on the old sage Fintan till he forced him to relate the ancient history of Ireland :\* and Conall Derg O'Corra and his wife, having failed to obtain children from God, turned to the devil and fasted on him to give them children, and obtained their request.† Nay, a legend relates that a certain man thinking himself hardly used by Providence, grumbled, and fasted against God for relief : and the tale goes on to say, that God was angry, but nevertheless dealt mercifully with him.‡ For the last two applications of fasting—to injure an enemy and to obtain a request—I can find no better authority than the romantic tales and religious legends : but the twofold custom is mentioned too often to permit us to doubt its existence.

This institution of fasting on a debtor is still widely diffused in the east, and is called by the Hindoos “sitting dharna.” They believe that if the plaintiff dies of starvation, the defendant is sure to be visited by fearful supernatural penalties. Our books do not give us much information about the Irish institution, and it is not easy to understand it in all its forms : but it is evidently identical with

\* Kilk. Arch. J., 1872-3, p. 141.

† Rev. Celt., xiv. 29.

‡ Stokes' Lives of SS., ix. See for another instance of this, Saltair na Rann, Preface III., last line : and for still another, Mac Congl., 60. Other examples of fasting for the several purposes may be seen in Rev. Celt., xv. 480 : Trip. Life, 219, bottom, 221, 419, top, 557 : Hyde, Lit. Hist., 233, 417 : Féilire, 171, 19

the eastern custom, and no doubt it was believed in pagan times to be attended by similar supernatural effects.\*

As there was no state authority to enforce legal decisions, it will occur to anyone to ask why should defendants submit to distress and fasting when the proceedings went against them : why, for instance, should not a man resist the removal of his goods in distress ? The reply to this is that hereditary custom, backed by public opinion, was so overwhelmingly strong that resistance was hardly ever resorted to. It is pretty evident that the man who refused to abide by the custom, not only incurred personal danger, but lost all character, and was subject to something like what we now call a universal boycott, which in those days no man could bear. He had in fact to fly and become a sort of outlaw. So Cæsar tells us (Gall. War, vi. 13) that those who refused to abide by the decisions of the Gaulish druids (corresponding in this procedure with our brehons) were excommunicated : and in Ireland he who disregards fasting " shall not be paid by God or man " (p. 205, *supra*). So also Martin records, in 1703, that in the western islands of Scotland, the man who violated the blood-covenant (for which see vol. II., p. 510) utterly lost character, so that all people avoided him : in other words he was boycotted.

#### 4. *Eric or Compensation Fine.*

Homicide or bodily injury of any kind was atoned for by a fine called **Eric** [errick], corresponding with the Teutonic *weregild*. But though this was the usual sense of *eric*, the word was often applied to a fine for injury of any sort.

For homicide, and for most injuries to person, property, or dignity, the *eric* or fine consisted of two parts—first, the payment for the mere injury, which was determined by the severity of the injury and by other circumstances ; second

\* Maine, *Anc. Inst.*, 40, 297.

a sum called **Log-enech** or **Eneclann**, 'honour-price,' which varied according to the rank of the parties: the higher the rank the greater the honour-price. The honour-price of an *og-aire* (see p. 159, *supra*) was 3 cows: of a *fer-fothla*, 7½ cows. A man's honour-price was diminished—which of course was a punishment—if he was guilty of any misconduct. **Dire**, which is a term constantly used in the Brehon Laws, seems to mean much the same as *eneclann*, a fine for personal injury of any kind—bodily harm, a slight on character, an insult, &c.—the amount depending on the nature of the offence and on the position and dignity of the persons. Indeed, in some parts of the Brehon Laws (as in v. 56, 16) *dire* is made equivalent to *eneclann*. The law of compensation would tend to favour the rich, as they could afford to pay better than the poor: and it was evidently with a view to remedy this that the arrangement of honour-price was introduced. The consideration of honour-price entered into a great number of the provisions of the Brehon Law; and this principle also existed in the early Teutonic Codes.\*

The principles on which these awards should be made are laid down in great detail in the Book of Acaill. The eric for murder was double that for simple manslaughter (or homicide without intent), "for fines are doubled by malice aforethought."† The exact amount of the eric was adjudged by a brehon. Many modifying circumstances had to be taken into account—the actual injury, the rank of the parties (for the honour-price), the intention of the wrong-doer, the provocation, the amount of set-off claims, &c.—so that the settlement called for much legal knowledge, tact, and technical skill on the part of the brehon—quite as much as we expect in a lawyer of the present day.

\* The honour-prices of the several grades (which were equal in amounts to their gifts to a church) may be seen in Br. Laws, III. 43: see also for several points connected with honour-price, vol. IV. 48, 49, 53, 59, and 307.

† Br. Laws, III. 99.

The man who killed a native freeman paid the amount of his own honour-price, and 21 cows (or double if of malice) : so that, suppose an *Og-airc* killed a freeman by misadventure, he had to pay altogether 24 cows (3 + 21), or if of malice, 45 cows (3 + 42), to the family of the victim. This will give some idea of the general standard adopted, it being understood that the total fine was higher or lower according to the rank of the parties. Eric for homicide continued to be exacted in Ireland by the Anglo-Irish as well as by the old native Irish, till the middle of the seventeenth century, that is, long after the Brehon Law had been legally abolished in the reign of James I.

In case of homicide the family of the victim were entitled to the eric. If the culprit did not pay, or absconded, leaving no property, his *finé* or family were liable ; the guiding principle here, as in other parts of the Brehon Law, being, that those who would be entitled to inherit the property of the offender should, next after himself—in their several proportions—be liable for the fine for homicide incurred by him.\* If they wished to avoid this, they were required to give up the offender to the family of the victim,† who might then, if they pleased, kill him, or use him or sell him as a slave. Failing this, his family had to expel him, and to lodge a sum to free themselves from the consequences of his subsequent misconduct.‡ The expelled person had to leave the tribe ; he was then a sort of outlaw, and would likely become a *daer-fudir* (p. 163, *supra*) in some other tribe. If neither the slayer nor his friends paid the murder-eric, then he might be lawfully killed by the friends of the victim. In the Book of Acaill (III. 349–355), there is a minute enumeration of bodily injuries, whether by design or accident, with the compensation for each, taking into account the position of

\* Br. Laws, III. 69 ; IV. 245.

† *Ibid.*, III. 69 : see also Corm. Gloss., 98 (" Imbleogan ").

‡ *Ibid.*, III. 382 note ; 383.



the parties, and the other numerous circumstances that modified the amount.\*

In Cormac's Glossary (p. 124, "Nes"), we are told that the eric for bodily injury depended on the "dignity" of the part injured: if it was the forehead, or chin, or any other part of the face, the eric was greater than if the injured part was covered by raiment. Half the eric for homicide was due for the loss of a leg, a hand, an eye, or an ear; but in no case was the collective eric for such injuries to exceed the body-fine—*i.e.* the eric for homicide (Br. Laws, III. 349).

Spenser, Davies, and other early English writers bitterly denounce the law of eric-fine for homicide, as "contrary to God's law and man's." It was indeed a rude and inadequate sort of justice, and favoured the rich, as they could afford to pay fines better than the poor, notwithstanding the precautionary introduction of honour-price. But it was, no doubt, very useful in its day, and was a great advance on the barbarous law of retaliation, which was nothing more than private vengeance.† The principle of compensation for murder was, moreover, not peculiar to Ireland—a fact that these writers appear to have been ignorant of. It existed among the Anglo-Saxons, as well as among the ancient Greeks, Franks, and Germans; and, as a German institution, it is mentioned with approval by Tacitus. In the Laws of King Athelstan, there is laid down a detailed scale of prices to be paid in compensation for killing persons of various ranks of society, from an archbishop or duke down to a churl or farmer; and traces of the custom remained in English law till the early part of the last century.‡

\* In another part, Br. Laws, III. 357 to 381, is a detailed enumeration of injuries to living animals, with the compensations for them.

† Maine, *Anc. Inst.*, 23.

‡ Ogyg., Part III., chapter lvii. : Ware, II. 71 ' Richey, Br. Laws, III. cxi. *et seq.*

5. *Modes of Punishment.*

Homicide, whether by intent or by misadventure, was atoned for like other injuries, by a money-fine. That men who killed others were themselves often killed in revenge by the friends of the victim—as in all other countries—we know from our annals. But the idea of awarding death as a *judicial* punishment for homicide, even when it amounted to murder, does not seem to have ever taken hold of the public mind in Ireland: “At this day [*i.e.* in the time of the “writer of the Commentary on the *Senchus Mór*] no one is “put to death [by judicial sentence] for his intentional “crimes, as long as eric-fine is obtained.”\* Capital punishment was known well enough, however, and practised outside the courts of law. The above passage is immediately followed by the statement that if, for any cause, the crime is not atoned for by eric, then the criminal’s life is forfeit: and kings claimed the right to put persons to death for certain crimes. Thus we are told, in the *Tripartite Life of St. Patrick* (p. 43), that neither gold nor silver would be accepted from him who lighted a fire before the lighting of the festival fire of Tara, but he should be put to death; and the death-penalty was inflicted on anyone who, at a fair-meeting, killed another or raised a serious quarrel.† It would seem, both from the ancient *Introduction to the Senchus Mór* and from the *Lives of St. Patrick*, that the early Christian missionaries attempted to introduce capital punishment—as the result of a judicial process—for murder, but without success.‡

Various modes of putting criminals to death were in use in ancient Ireland. Sometimes the culprit was drowned by being flung into water, either tied up in a sack or with a heavy stone round his neck. In this manner the Danish

\* Br. Laws, I. 15.

† Vol. II., p. 447, *infra*.

‡ Br. Laws, I. 13.

tyrant Turgesius was put to death by King Malachi, A.D. 845 : and the reader may be reminded of Scott's striking description in *Rob Roy* (chap. xxxi.) of the drowning of Morris in the Highland river by the chief's wife.

Sometimes hanging was adopted—a mode of execution generally called *riagad* [ree-a], from *riag* [reea], 'a gibbet,' which glosses *patibulum* in Zeuss. Hanging was also called *crochad*, from *croch*, 'a cross' or 'gallows' : *crochad*, 'crucifixio' (Zeuss, 74, 7) : but in Ireland it meant, and still means, 'hanging by the neck till dead.' In O'Clery's Glossary *riaghadh* is explained by *crochadh*.

It was a very ancient Irish custom to burn women for adultery. That such a custom existed is rendered certain by its frequent mention in old writings. Perhaps the most authoritative of these is Cormac's Glossary (p. 59), which gives the derivation of *druth*, 'a harlot,' from the two words *dir*, 'right,' and *aod*, 'fire' (the idea being that *druth* was contracted from *dir-aod*, 'right-fire'), "As much as saying"—the Glossary continues—"to burn her were right." When Murni of the Fair Neck married Cumal, after eloping with him ; and when, soon afterwards, Cumal was killed in the Battle of Cnucha (Castleknock), and Murni was found to be pregnant ; her father, not acknowledging lawful marriage, urged his people to burn her : "but he dared not compass it for fear of Conn the Hundred-fighter," with whom the lady had taken refuge.\* The son that was born to her was the celebrated hero Finn Mac Cumail. On this story Hennessy, the editor, quotes a statement from the story of Corc Mac Lugdach in the Book of Leinster—"It was the custom "at first to burn any woman who committed lust (*dognid* " *bais*) in violation of her compact." In the story of the Greek princess (in the Book of Leinster), she says—"My "crime [of unchastity] will now be found out, and I shall "be burned immediately."† Many other such records might

\* Cause of the Battle of Cnucha, *Rev. Celt.*, II. 91.

† Silva Gad., Irish text, 414 : LL. 279, 8, 251, 26.

be instanced, both from the lay literature and the Lives of the Saints.\* In nearly all the cases I have found, however, something intervened to prevent the actual burning ; which would indicate that, at the time the records were written, the custom was dying out. Indeed, this is also implied in one of the above quotations—" It was the custom *at first*."

Where the death penalty was not inflicted for a crime, various other modes of punishment were resorted to, though never as the result of a judicial process before a brehon : for the brehon's business was to award compensation—never a penalty of any other kind (p. 199, *supra*). Blinding as a punishment was very common : we meet with records of it everywhere in the annals ; so that there is no need to quote individual instances here. Whenever we find such a record, it is commonly the sequel of a battle ; for it often happened that the victorious king or chief, if he captured his defeated opponent, blinded him. It was usually done by thrusting a needle into the eye. Sometimes blinding was an act of vengeance merely ; sometimes it was in punishment of rebellion ; and not unfrequently when two opponents fought for the chiefship or kingship, the defeated leader was blinded to prevent the possibility of his election at any time : for a disfigured person could not be elected as king or chief (p. 43, *supra*). Occasionally a hostage was blinded when the treaty was broken by his party. The custom of blinding as a punishment prevailed among other nations as well as among the Irish.

A very singular punishment was to send the culprit adrift on the open sea in a boat, without sail, oar, or rudder. In the Commentary on the Senchus Mór (Br. Laws, I. 15, 10), it is stated that in case eric was not obtained for homicide, the guilty person was put to death if the crime was intentional ; but he was placed on the sea if it was unintentional. The men of Ross (in the north of Tirconnell) killed their

\* As in Kilk. Arch. Journ., 1868, p. 333, top : Sull., Introd., 322 and note, 334, top : Dr. Healy, Ireland's Anc. Schools, 227, 16, and 476 : Féilire, 63, a, 7 bot.



tyrannical chief Fiacha ; whereupon Fiacha's brother Donnchad, king of Tirconnell, punished them by putting sixty in small boats and sending them adrift on the sea, " that God might deal with them."\* *Macc-Cuill* or *Maccaldus*, a powerful Ulster chief, was an abandoned reprobate : but he was converted by St. Patrick, became very repentant, and submitted himself to the saint's penance, who directed him to put off to sea in a curragh of one hide. After much weary drifting about, the curragh was thrown on the Isle of Man, where Mac Cuill safely landed. He preached the Gospel there, and converted the Manxmen : so that he is to this day venerated as the patron saint, with the name Maughold (Trip. Life, 223). The great Anglo-Norman baron, Hugh de Lacy, followed the old native custom when he sent the betrayers of John de Courcy adrift in a ship, " with victuals and furniture, but without mariners or seamen."† A person of this kind cast on shore belonged to the owner of the shore until a *cumal* was paid for his release.‡

### 6. Courts of Justice.

A court held for the trial of legal cases was commonly called *dál* [dawl], but sometimes *oirecht* or *airecht*, which was also the name of a meeting of representative people to settle local affairs.§ Courts were often held in the open air, and sometimes in buildings. There was a gradation of courts from the lowest—something like our petty sessions—to the highest, the great national assembly—whether at Tara or elsewhere—representing all Ireland.|| Over each court a member of the chieftain or privileged classes presided : the rank of the president corresponded to the rank

\* Rev. Celt. ix., 17, 19.

† Other references to sending adrift :—Br. Laws, i. 205, bot. : O'Curry, Man. & Cust., i. 29 : MS. Mat., 333 : Sull., Introd., 120, 334 : Todd, Book of Fermoy, 38.

‡ Br. Laws, i. 205, bot.

§ For various meetings and courts for the transaction of legal business, see Sullivan, Introd., 252 : and for further information on the administration of justice, p. 262 of the same vol.

|| For which, see vol. II., p. 436.

of the court : and his legal status, duties, powers, and privileges were very strictly defined. The over-king presided over the National *Féis* or assembly. If a man whose duty it was to attend a court for any function, and who was duly summoned, failed to appear, he was heavily fined ; and in such a case an ecclesiastic was fined twice as much as a layman.\*

In each court—besides the brehon who sat in judgment—there were one or more professional lawyers, advocates, or pleaders, called, in Cormac's Glossary,† *dálaighe* [dawlee] and *dai*, who conducted the cases for their clients ; and the brehon-judge had to hear the pleadings for both sides before coming to a decision (Br. Laws, v. 355). A non-professional man who conducted a case—which he might, as at the present day, if he wished to take the risk—was called a “ tongueless person ” (Br. Laws, iv. 303, 16). Whether the court was held in a building or in the open air, there was a platform of some kind on which the pleader stood while addressing the court. This appears from the explanation of *Cuisnit* (‘ legal disputation ’) in Cormac's Glossary (p. 41) :—“ *Cuisnit*, derived from *cos-na-dála*, the “ foot, or bar, or tribune on which the pleader stands : and “ it is at it or from it he pleads, and it is on it he stands.” According to a Preface to the *Amra*, one of the causes for the meeting at Drumketta was “ to make rules as to pleaders and suitors in Erin.”‡

With regard to evidence, various rules were in force, which may be gathered from detached passages in the laws and general literature. In order to prove home a matter of fact in a court of justice, at least two witnesses were required : a usage that is mentioned more than once by Adamnan. If a man gave evidence against his wife, the wife was entitled to give evidence in reply ; but a man's daughter would not be heard against him in like circumstances. A chief could give evidence against a *daer* tenant,

\* Br. Laws, III. 331, and note 1.

† Corm., p. 41, “ *Cuisnit*.”

‡ Rev. Celt., xx. 35, note 1.

or any freeman against a *fudir* ; but neither the *daer* tenant nor the *fudir* could give rebutting evidence : and a king's evidence was good against all other people, with three exceptions (for which, see p. 55, *supra*). The period at which a young man could give legal evidence was when he was seventeen years of age, or when he began to grow a beard.

The Irish delighted in judgments delivered in the form of a sententious maxim, or an apt illustration—some illustration bearing a striking resemblance to the case in question. The jurist who decided a case by the aid of such a parallel was recognised as gifted with great judicial wisdom, and his judgment often passed into a proverb. Several judgments of this kind are recorded. When Cormac Mac Art, the rightful heir to the throne of Ireland, was a boy, he lived at Tara in disguise ; for the throne was held by the usurper Mac Con, so that Cormac dared not reveal his identity. There was at this time living near Tara a female *brewy*, named Bennaid, whose sheep trespassed on the royal domain, and ate up the queen's crop of *glaisín* or woad for dyeing. The queen instituted proceedings for damages ; and the question came up for decision before the king, who, after hearing the evidence, decided that the sheep should be forfeit in payment for the *glaisín*. "Not so," exclaimed the boy Cormac, who was present, and who could not restrain his judicial instincts : "the cropping of the sheep should be sufficient for the cropping of the *glaisín*—the wool for the woad—for both will grow again." "That is true judgment," exclaimed all : "and he who has pronounced it is surely the son of a king"—for kings were supposed to possess a kind of inspiration in giving their decisions. And so they discovered who Cormac was, and in a short time placed him on the throne, after deposing the usurper.\* Another example of this sort of judgment will be seen in the notice of the *Cathach*, at p. 501, *infra*.

\* *Silva Gad.*, 288, 357 : *Petrie*, Tara, 219.

## PART II

RELIGION, LEARNING, AND ART.





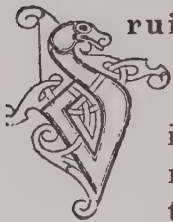


FIG. 72.—Sculpture on Window : Cathedral Church, Glendalough : Beranger, 1779.  
(From Petrie's Round Towers.)

## CHAPTER IX

### PAGANISM

#### SECTION I. *Druids : their Functions and Powers.*



**Druidism.**—No trustworthy information regarding the religion of the pagan Irish comes to us from outside : whatever knowledge of it we possess is derived exclusively from the native literature. Moreover, all of this literature that has come down to us was written—mostly copied from older documents—in Christian times by Christians, chiefly monks : no books penned in pre-Christian ages have been preserved. The Christian copyists, too, modified their originals in many ways, especially by introducing Christian allusions, and, no doubt, by softening down many pagan features that were particularly repellent to them. Yet many passages, and some complete tales, remain thoroughly pagan in character.\*

So far as we can judge from the materials at our command, which are sufficiently abundant, though scattered and somewhat vague, the pagan Irish appear to have had no well-defined connected system of religion. There were many gods, but no supreme god, like Zeus or Jupiter

\* On this point see the remarks at page 534, *infra*.

among the Greeks and Romans. There was little or no prayer, and no settled general form of worship. There were no temples : but it appears from a passage in Cormac's Glossary (as quoted below) that there were altars of some kind erected to idols or to elemental gods, which must have been in the open air. We find mention of things offered to gods or idols. Thus, for instance, in the oldest version of " The Wooing of Emer," we are informed that, at *Bron-Trogin* (the beginning of autumn), the young of every kind of animal used to be " assigned to the possession of the idol, *Bel* " ;\* and other such examples might be cited. But in all these cases it appears to have been a mere nominal offer or dedication—a matter of words only—and it is doubtful if there was any sacrifice properly so called. We have a few examples where breaches of what were laid down as moral rules were punished. When King Laegaire broke his solemn oath sworn by the sun and wind, which were regarded as gods, he was, as we are told, killed by these two elements (p. 292, *infra*) : from which we can see that there were some rules of conduct which it was dangerous to violate. But, on the whole, the pagan Irish religion seems to have had very little influence in regulating moral conduct. At the same time, it must be borne in mind, that all our very early books have been lost, so that, in great probability, the whole of the evidence is not before us : had we complete information, it might modify our judgment on Irish paganism.

The religion of the pagan Irish is commonly designated as Druidism : and as the druids were a numerous and important class, and as they were mixed up with most of the religious or superstitious rites and observances, it will be best to begin by giving a sketch of their position and functions, which will bring under review a large part of the religious beliefs of the pagan Irish. In the oldest Irish traditions the druids figure conspicuously. All the

\* Rev, Celt. xi. 443.

early colonists had their druids, who are mentioned as holding high rank among kings and chiefs.

**Gaulish and Irish Druids.**—Of the Gaulish druids, their doctrines and worship, detailed accounts have been given by Cæsar\* and other classical writers : and these descriptions are generally supposed to apply to the druids of Britain—a supposition, however, open to doubt. But these writers knew nothing of the druids of Ireland, and of course give no information regarding them. It is pretty certain, indeed, that the druidic systems of Gaul, Britain, and Ireland were originally one and the same. But the Gaels of Ireland and Scotland were separated and isolated for many centuries from the Celtic races of Gaul ; and thus, their religious system, like their language, naturally diverged, so that the druidism of Ireland, as pictured forth in the native records, differed in many respects from that of Gaul. Yet, with one exception, all those writers who have hitherto treated of Irish druids have unhesitatingly applied to them Cæsar's and other classical writers' descriptions of those of Gaul.† O'Curry was the first, so far as I know, to describe in detail (in Lectures ix. and x. of his *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*) the Irish druids from the native authorities. Certain speculative writers of the last two or three generations, backing up Cæsar's description with baseless suppositions of their own, have built up a great pagan religious system for Ireland, with druidic temples, druid's altars, human sacrifices, divination from the manner in which the blood of victims flowed down the sloping altars, and such like : all in great detail and all quite visionary, being based on insufficient evidence, or rather on no evidence at all. The following account of

\* Gallic War, vi. xiii-xviii.

† In Harris's *Ware* (*Antiqq.*, p. 117) is an excellent essay on Druids, setting forth the testimonies of the principal classical authorities regarding them. It professes to treat of druids in connexion with Ireland : but it is nearly all about Gaulish druids, with merely a few sentences about those of Britain and Ireland.



the Irish druids is derived from the native literature, the only authentic source of information. It will be shown in the next section that, while there are many differences between the Irish and the Gaulish druids, there are also many resemblances and correspondences, and these in some of their most important functions.

**Name.**—The old form of the Irish name for a druid is *drui*, modern *drai* or *draoi* [all pron. dree] ; but in the oblique cases it takes a *d* : gen. *druad*, dative *druid*, corresponding with the modern word *druid*. *Drui* is uniformly translated ‘wizard’ by some of the best modern authorities: and wizards the druids unquestionably were, and are so presented by our earliest traditions, though always called *drui*. The druids of Gaul and Ireland were undoubtedly identical as a class, though differing in many particulars, and they were all wizards ; but those of Gaul are always called ‘druids’ : and to apply the term ‘druid’ to the one class and ‘wizard’ to the other, might lead to a misconception, as if they were essentially different. That the ancient Irish considered their own druids in a general way identical with those of the Continent appears from this—that they apply the word *drui* to both : and while Latin writers commonly translate *druid* by ‘magus,’ this same word ‘magus’ is retranslated *drui* by Irish writers. Thus, Simon Magus is called in Irish writings “Simon Drui.” For these reasons it will be more convenient to retain here the familiar word ‘druid.’

**Druids, the Sole Men of Learning.**—In pagan times the druids were the exclusive possessors of whatever learning was then known. They combined in themselves all the learned professions : they were not only druids, but judges, prophets, historians, poets, and even physicians.\* But as time went on there was a gradual tendency towards specialisation, as we see in some of the learned professions of our

\* Physicians : see Sick Bed, Atlantis, I. 391, verses 3 and 4.

own day. "Until Patrick came,"—says the Brehon Law (I. 19)—"only three classes of persons were permitted to speak in public in Erin [*i.e.* their pronouncements received some sort of official recognition], viz. a chronicler to relate events and tell stories; a poet to eulogise and satirise; a brehon or judge to pass sentence from the precedents and commentaries." Here there is a clear intimation that there were three separate persons concerned. Nevertheless, down to the latest period of the prevalence of the Irish customs, two or more professions were often centred in one man, especially those of Poetry, History, and Literature in general.

There were druids in every part of Ireland, but, as we might expect, Tara, the residence of the over-kings of Ireland, was—as the Tripartite Life (p. 41) expresses it—"the chief [seat] of the idolatry and druidism of Erin." The druids had the reputation of being great magicians: and in this character they figure more frequently and conspicuously than in any other, both in ecclesiastical and lay literature. So true is this, that the most general Irish word for sorcery, magic, or necromancy, is *druidecht*, which simply means 'druidism'—a word still in use. In some of the old historical romances we find the issues of battles sometimes determined, not so much by the valour of the combatants, as by the magical powers of the druids attached to the armies. They could—as the legends tell—raise druidical clouds and mists, and bring down showers of fire and blood; they could drive a man insane or into idiocy by flinging a magic wisp of straw in his face. In the hymn that St. Patrick chanted on his way to Tara on Easter Sunday morning, he asks God to protect him against the spells of women, of smiths, and of druids. Broichan the druid threatens St. Columba:—"Thou wilt not be able to [voyage on Loch Ness,] for I will make the wind contrary to thee, and I will bring a great darkness over thee." And he did so, as Adamnan's narrative (150) tells us: but

Columba removed the storm and darkness by prayer, and made his voyage.

**Insanity.**—Perhaps the most dreaded of all the necromantic powers attributed to the druids was that of producing madness. In the pagan ages, and down far into Christian times, madness—Irish *dásacht*—was believed to be often brought on by malignant magical agency, usually the work of some druid. For this purpose the druid prepared a ‘madman’s wisp’ or ‘fluttering wisp’ (*dlui fulla* : *dlui* or *dluigh*, ‘a wisp’), that is, a little wisp of straw or grass, into which he pronounced some horrible incantations, and, watching his opportunity, flung it into the face of his victim, who at once became insane or idiotic. So generally was insanity attributed to this, that in the Glosses to the *Senchus Mór*, a madman (Irish *dásachtach* or *fulla*) is repeatedly described as one “upon whom the *dlui fulla* or magic wisp has been thrown.”\*

The legend of Comgan illustrates this fell necromantic power. Maelochtair, king of the Decies in Munster, early in the seventh century, had a son named Comgan, remarkable for his manly beauty and accomplishments, who was half-brother by the same mother to St. Cummain Fota. One day, at a great fair held in Tipperary, Comgan carried off all the prizes in the athletic sports : and the spectators were delighted with him, especially the king’s druid. But a certain woman, who had before that vainly sought Comgan’s love, now revenged herself on him by whispering a false accusation into the druid’s ear : whereupon his admiration for the youth was instantly changed to furious jealousy; and when Comgan and his friends retired to a neighbouring river to wash themselves and their horses after the sports, he followed them, and watching his opportunity, flung a magic wisp over him, at the same time pronouncing some fiendish words. When the young man came forth from

\* Br. Laws, I. 84, line 29 ; 85, 90 (and note) ; 124 and 126 ; and Gloss, 143 ; II. 47 : III. 13, 3.

the water, his whole body burst out into boils and ulcers, so that his attendants had to bring him to his father's house, all diseased and helpless as he was. There he wasted away in body, his mind decayed, his hair fell off : and ever afterwards he wandered about the palace, a bald, drivelling idiot. But he had lucid intervals, and then he became an inspired poet, and uttered prophecies ; so that he is known in the legendary literature as *Mac-da-cerda*, the ' youth of the two arts,' that is to say, poetry and foolishness.\*

The invention of the madman's wisp is assigned, by a legend in the *Cóir Anmann* (p. 367), to a celebrated Leinster druid named Fullon, who lived centuries before the Christian era :—" Fullon was the first druid who cast a spell (*bricht*) on " a wisp, so as to send [by means of it] a human being a- " flying (*for foluamhain*.) Hence, *dlui fulla*, or ' madman's " wisp,' is a saying among the Scots from that day to this."

As I am on the subject of madness, it will be better to finish here what is to be said about it. A fit of insanity was often called *baile* or *buile* [*ballē*, *bullē* : and there was a most curious belief that during the paroxysm a madman's body became as light as air, so that, as he ran distractedly, he scarcely touched the ground, or he rose into the air, still speeding on with a sort of fluttering motion. This was especially the case when madness was produced by the rage of battle. For, during a bloody battle, it sometimes happened that an excitable combatant ran mad with fury and horror : and occurrences of this kind are recorded in the romantic accounts of nearly all the great battles fought in Ireland. We are told, in the historic story of the Battle of Moyrath (175, note *v* ; and 235), fought A.D. 637, that towards the close of the day, a brave young warrior, *Suibne* or Sweeny, became distracted with the horrors he witnessed ; and imagining he saw battle-demons hovering and shrieking overhead, he suddenly bounded off the earth. and alighted

\* Todd, *Book of Hymns*, 90.



on the boss of another warrior's shield, from which, after a moment, he leaped up again ; and so he continued flitting and bounding on the shields and helmet-crests of the combatants and on the tops of the neighbouring trees, till he finally fled from the field ; after which he wandered round Ireland, a *gelt* [*g* hard! or madman. His adventures from the day of battle till his death are told in a romantic tale, still extant in MS., called *Buile Shuibne*, ' Sweeney's frenzy or madness.'

The belief that men were driven mad in battle, and ran and fluttered away in this manner, found its way into the sober records of the Annalists, who relate that at the Battle of Allen in Kildare, fought A.D. 722, nine persons went crazy with terror, or, as Tigernach expresses it, "*Et ix volatiles, i.e. gellai*" : " and nine persons [went] flying, *i.e.* madmen."\*

Even the Norse visitors to this country took up the legend : and we find it recorded as one of the " Wonders of Ireland," in an old Norse Book called " *Kongs Skuggsjo* " or " *Speculum Regale*," written about A.D. 1250:—" There is also one thing which will seem very wonderful, about men who are called *gel'* " ; and the writer goes on to tell about men running mad out of battle, and living in woods for twenty years, so that feathers grew on their bodies : and that though they were not quite able to fly, they were incredibly swift, and " run along the [tops of the] trees almost as swiftly as monkeys or squirrels."† Of this superstition—that frenzied madmen were as light as air, and could climb up precipices—there are many other examples in the ancient tales : we see by the above quotation that it retained its hold till the thirteenth century ; and it still lingers among the peasantry in some remote districts.‡

\* Rev. Celt., xvii. 229 ; and xxiv. 55 : see also FM, vol. 1., p. 319, top.

† Folklore, v. 311.

‡ Moyrath, 231, 233 : see also Sir Samuel Ferguson's Congal, 227, 233, 234, 235.

There is a valley in Kerry called Glannagalt, 'the glen of the *galts* or lunatics' (Irish, *gleann-na-ngealt*) and it is believed that all lunatics, if left to themselves, would find their way to it, no matter from what part of Ireland. When they have lived in its solitude for a time, drinking of the water of Tobernagalt ('the lunatics' well'), and eating of the cresses that grow along the little stream, the poor wanderers get restored to sanity. It appears by the story of the Battle of Ventry that this glen was first discovered by a youth named Goll, who fled frenzied from that battle, as Sweeny from Moyrath, and plunged into the seclusion of Glannagalt.\* There is a well in Donegal which was believed to possess the same virtue as Tobernagalt, and to which all the deranged people in the surrounding district were wont to resort. It is situated on the strand, near high-water mark, a third of a mile south of Inishowen Head, near the entrance to Lough Foyle. It still retains its old name *Srubb Brain*, 'Bran's *srub* or stream,' which is represented in the name of the adjacent hamlet of Stroove.†

**Various Powers.**—In the Lives of the Saints, the druids and their magical arts figure conspicuously; as, for instance, in the Tripartite Life of St. Patrick, and in the earlier memoir of the saint, by Muirchu, as well as in Adamnan's Life of Saint Columba: and not less so in the historical tales. Before the Battle of Cul-Dremne, fought in 561 between the Northern and the Southern Hy Neill, Dermot, king of Ireland, who headed the southern Hy Neill—a Christian king—called in the aid of the druid Fraechan [Freehan], who, just as the armies were about to engage, made an *airbe druad* [arvā drooa] round the southern army to protect it.‡ It is not easy to say what this *airbe*

\* Joyce, Irish Names of Places, I. 172, 173.

† MS. Mat., 477: O'Donovan, Suppl. to O'Reilly, "*Sraobh*."

‡ For the *airbe druad* see Stokes, Lives, xxviii.: FM, A.D. 555: Todd, St. Patk., 119-122: Silva Gad., 85, and 516, 2. See also p. 234, below.

*druad* was. Stokes translates it 'druid's fence'; and, no doubt, it was a magic fence of some kind: for this is the usual sense of *airbe* in old Irish writings. One man of the northern army, named Mag Laim, sprang across the *airbe*, by which he broke the charm, but sacrificed his own life, for he was at once slain: after which the battle was fought, and Dermot was defeated with a loss of 3000, while Mag Laim alone fell on the other side. All this is related by Tigernach and the other Annalists. In the *Agallamh na Senórach*, a chief's dun is mentioned as sometimes surrounded by a *snaidm druad* [snime drooa], a 'druid's knot': is this the same as the *airbe druad*, or have the two any connexion?

The druid could pronounce a malign incantation—no doubt a sort of *glám dichenn* (see p. 240, *infra*)—not only on an individual, but on a whole army, so as to produce a withering or enervating effect on the men. Before the Battle of *Mucrimè* (A.D. 250), Aillil Olum's son Eoghan, one of the contending princes, came to Dil, the blind old druid of Ossory, to ask him to maledict the hostile army, as Balak employed Balaam; but on their way towards the place, Dil came somehow to know by Eoghan's voice that he was doomed to defeat and death, and refused to proceed farther (Silva Gad., 354).

The druids could give a drink of forgetfulness (*deog dermaid*), so as to efface the memory of any particular transaction. Cuculainn had fallen in love with the fairy lady Fand, so that his wife Emer was jealous: but Conco-bar's druids gave each of them—Cuculainn and Emer—a drink of forgetfulness, so that he quite forgot Fand and she her jealousy; and they were reconciled (Sick Bed: Atl., II. 124). The druids were the intermediaries with the fairies, and with the invisible world in general, which they could influence for good or evil; and they could protect people from the malice of evil-disposed spirits of every kind; which explains much of their influence with the people.

**Divination.**—An important function of the druid was divination—forecasting future events—which was practised by the pagan Irish in connexion with almost all important affairs, such as military expeditions. Laegaire's druids foretold the coming of St. Patrick (Trip. Life, 33) ; and the druid Dubdiad foretells the defeat and death of Congal in the Battle of Moyrath (p. 171). Queen Maive, before setting out on the Táin expedition, confers with her druid to get from him knowledge and prophecy : so he prophesies :—" Whosoever they be that will not return, thou thyself shalt certainly return." The druids forecasted; partly by observation of natural objects or occurrences, and partly by certain artificial rites : and in the exercise of this function the druid was a *fáith* [faw] or prophet.

They drew auguries from observation of the clouds. On the eve of a certain *Samain* (first of November), Dathi, king of Ireland (A.D. 405 to 428), who happened at the time to be at *Cnoc-nan-druad* (' the druids' hill ' : now Mullaroe, and often incorrectly called Red Hill), in the parish of Skreen, Sligo, west of Ballysadare Bay, where there was then a royal residence, ordered his druid to forecast for him the events of his reign from that till next *Samain*. The druid went to the summit of the hill, where he remained all night, and, returning at sunrise, addressed the king somewhat as the witches addressed Macbeth :—" Art thou asleep, O King of Erin and Alban (Scotland) ? " " Why the addition to my title ? " asked the king : " I am not king of Alban." And the druid answered that he had consulted " the clouds of the men of Erin," by which he found out that the king would make a conquering expedition to Alban, Britain, and Gaul : which accordingly he did soon afterwards.\*

This account of cloud divination is corroborated by the existence in Irish of the word *néladóir* [nailadore] for an astrologer or diviner : and *neladóracht* glosses

\* MS. Mat., 285 : HyF, 99.



“pyromantia ” (‘ divination by fire ’), in an old Irish treatise on Latin declension.\* But the primary meaning of *néladóir* is ‘ cloud-diviner ’; and of *néladóracht*, ‘ divination by clouds ’; for *nél*, *néul*, *néll*, means ‘ a cloud,’ even to this day, and not star or fire.

Astrology, in the proper sense of the word—divination from the stars—appears, nevertheless, to have been practised by the Irish. Forecasting the proper time for beginning to build a house is alluded to in a short Irish poem contained in an eighth-century manuscript, now in a monastery in Carinthia, having been brought thither by some early Irish missionary :—“ There is no house more “ auspicious, with its stars last night, with its sun, with its “ moon.”† This reference to astrology is in a purely Christian connexion, as it appears from the poem that the house in question was built by the great Christian architect the Gobban Saer. In the legends of the saints we find divination by the heavenly bodies. When St. Columkille was a child, his foster-father went to a certain prophet (*fáith*) to ask him when the child was to begin to learn his letters ; and the prophet, having first scanned the heavens, decided that the lessons were to begin at once.‡

For purposes of divination the druids often used a rod of yew with Ogham words cut on it. When Etain, King Ochy Airem’s queen, was carried off by the fairy King Midir, the druid Dallan was commissioned by King Ochy to find out where she was. After much searching he at last “ made four rods of yew, and writes an Ogham on “ them ; and by his keys of knowledge and by his Ogham, “ it [the fairy palace where the queen was] is revealed to “ him.”§ Dr. Stokes points out that similarly at Praeneste the oracles were derived from lots consisting of oak with ancient characters engraved on them.

\* Stokes, *Irish Glosses*, in *Treatise on Latin Declension*, 63, 271.

† O’Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, II. 46, and note †. But see *Append.*, *infra*.

‡ Stokes, *Three Homilies*, 103.

§ *Rev. Celt.* XII. 440 : O’Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, I. 193.

In several of the tales we find mention of a druidic 'wheel divination,' *i.e.* made by means of a wheel. The celebrated druid Mogh Ruith [Mow-rih] of Dairbre, now Valentia Island, in Kerry, was so called on account of his skill in this sort of divination; for, in the *Cóir Anmann* (409), we read of him:—"Mogh Ruith signifies *Magus* " *rotarum*, the wizard [or rather the devotee] of the wheels, " for it is by wheels he used to make his *taiscéladh druidh-* " *echla* or 'magical observation.' " In another place\* we read that his daughter, who went with him to the East to learn magic, made a *roth ramhach* or 'rowing-wheel,' probably for the purpose of divination. But the *roth ramhach* figured in other functions, as may be seen in O'Curry's MS. Materials (Index). I have not the least notion of how the druidical divination-wheel was made or how it was used: but it may be of interest to observe here that—as Rhys remarks—the old Gaulish sun-god is represented with a wheel in his hand.†

Finn Mac Cumail, besides his other accomplishments, had the gift of divination, for which he used a rite peculiar to himself. A basin of clear water was brought to him, in which, having washed his hands, and having complied with some other formalities, he put his thumb in his mouth under his "tooth of knowledge," on which the future event he looked for was revealed to him. This is repeatedly mentioned in the tales of The Fena; and the legend is prevalent everywhere in Ireland at the present day. In the story of "The Praise of Cormac and the Death of Finn" (Silva Gad., 98), this rite is said to be a sort of *Teinm Laegda* or part of it (see p. 243. below).

In the Irish Nennius (p. 145) we are told that certain druids taught druidism, idolatry, sorcery, [the composition of] bright poems, divination from sneezing, from the voices of birds, and from other omens; and how to find out by these means suitable weather and lucky days for any

\* O'Grady, Silva Gad., 511, 28

† Rhys, Hibbert Lectures, 55.

enterprise. Before the Battle of Moyrath (p. 9) the druid interprets King Domnall's dream, and advises precautionary measures. Divination by the voices of birds was very generally practised, especially from the croaking of the raven and the chirping of the wren : and the very syllables they utter and their interpretation are given in the old books.\* The wren in particular was considered so great a prophet, that in an old Life of St. Moling one of its Irish names, *drean*, is fancifully derived from *druí-én*, meaning the 'druid of birds.' When St. Kellach, Bishop of Killala, was about to be murdered, the raven croaked, and the grey-coated scallcrow called, the wise little wren twittered ominously, and the kite of Cloon-O sat on his yew-tree waiting patiently to carry off his talons-full of the victim's flesh. But when, after the deed had been perpetrated, the birds of prey came scrambling for their shares, every one that ate the least morsel of the saint's flesh dropped down dead.† The Welsh birds of prey knew better when they saw the bodies of the slaughtered druids :—

"Far, far aloof the affrighted ravens sail,  
The famished eagle screams and passes by."

*The Bard* : by GRAY.

Just before the attack by Ingcel and his band of pirates on Da Derga's Hostel, the howl of Ossar, King Conari's *messan* or lapdog, portended the coming of battle and slaughter (Da Derga, 208). The clapping of hands was used in some way as an omen ; and also an examination of the shape of a crooked knotted tree-root.‡

Sometimes animals were sacrificed as part of the ceremony of divination. When King Conari and his retinue were in Da Derga's Hostel, several unusual and ominous circumstances occurred which foreboded disaster to the hostel : whereupon the king's chief juggler (who had just

\* O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, I. 224.

† Silva Gad., 58, 59, 60.

‡ Todd, *St. Patk.*, 122

failed, for the first time in his life, to perform his juggling feat—one of the omens) said to the druid Fer-Caillë, “Sacrifice thy pig now, and find out who is about to attack the hostel.” Fer-Caillë did so, and foretold the impending destruction of the hostel by pirates (Da Derga 287).

**Lucky and unlucky Days.**—There were certain *cross* days in every month of the year which were unlucky for undertaking any enterprise, of which a list is given by O’Curry (Moylena, 73, *t*) from an Irish medical MS. But on individual occasions the druids determined the days to be avoided, often by calculations of the moon’s age. A druid predicted that his daughter’s baby, if born on a certain day, would turn out just an ordinary person : but if born on the next day, he was to be a king and the ancestor of kings. Accordingly, the poor mother so managed that the birth was delayed till next day, but sacrificed her own life by doing so : and her baby was subsequently Fiacha Muillethan, an illustrious king of Munster.\* Many examples might be cited where disaster attended an undertaking on account of beginning it on an unlucky day. It is hardly necessary to remark that the superstition of lucky and unlucky days was common amongst most ancient nations, and that it still lives vigorously among ourselves in all grades of society.

**Tonsure.**—The druids had a tonsure. The two druids Mael and Caplait, brothers, the tutors of King Laegaire’s daughters Ethnea and Fedelma, had their hair cut in a magical figure—“Norma Magica”—called in Irish *Airbacc Giunnae* ; about the meaning of which there has been some doubt. Dr. Todd† asserts that it means ‘as the bond of *Gehenna* or hell’ ; but the Rev. Dr. Hogan‡ questions this, and thinks it may mean simply ‘cut of the hair,’ making *airbacc* equal *caesura*, from *bacc*, ‘tonsio’ or ‘ligo,’ with the prep. *air*. That he is right in making

\* Rev. Celt., xi. 43 : Silva Gad., 354.

† St. Patk., 455.

‡ Documenta, 73, *a*.



*giunnae*, 'of the hair,' is plain from a passage in the *Cóir Anmann* (395) which explains *giunnach* as meaning *fol!*, i.e. 'hair.' But it seems to me that *airbacc* is merely *airbe* (as in *Airbe-druad*: p. 227, *supra*) with the common termination *-ach*; as we write *smólach* (thrush) for *smól*, and as *giunnach* from *giunnae*, above. For *airbacc* is the way of writing *airbeach* or *airbach* used by Latin writers, as they wrote *Fiacc* for *Fiach*. If this is so, *airbacc giunnae* means merely the 'fence-cut of the hair,' implying that in this tonsure the hair was cut in such a way as to leave a sort of eave or fence along some part of the head. St. Patrick considered the *Norma Magica* a diabolical mark: for when these two druids were converted, he had their hair cut so as to obliterate it. The very name of one of these brothers, *Macl*, signifying bald, conveys the sense of tonsured: for we see from the narrative that he was not naturally bald. Moreover one of Laegaire's druids at Tara was called *Lucet Mael*, which name is made by the old Latin writers *Lucet calvus*, i.e. the bald or tonsured.

In connexion with this it will be interesting to mention that in Muirchu's *Memoir of St. Patrick* we read of a certain Ulster chief named *Maccuill* (for whom see p. 214, *supra*), very tyrannical and wicked, a notorious robber and murderer. This man openly proclaimed his own character by adopting, as an indication of his villainous career, certain marks, usually exhibited by persons of his sort, which are elsewhere explained as *signa diabolica super capita*, 'diabolical marks on the head': no doubt, some special cut of the hair.\* The adoption of this mark was an indication that the persons devoted themselves to the service of the devil, and became *diberga*, i.e. people who practised violence, robbery, and murder, as a sort of profession.

**Heathen Baptism.**—The druids had a "heathen baptism" (*baisteadh geinntlidhe*). The three sons of Conall

\* Trip. Life, 236, note 6: Hogan, Docum., 41. 167 ("Diberca").

Derg O'Corra were baptised according to this rite, with the direct intention of devoting them to the service of the devil, though they afterwards became three very holy men.\* So also the celebrated Red Branch hero Conall Kernach. When he was born, "druids came to baptise the child into "heathenism : and they sang the heathen baptism (*baithis geintlídhe*) over the little child ; and they said :—' Never "will be born a boy who will be more impious than this "boy towards the Connacians.' "† When Ailill Olum, king of Munster in the beginning of the third century, was a child, "he was baptised [pagan fashion] in druidic streams" (Moylena, 165). In the Gaelic version of the Travels of Sir John Mandeville, where the Scripture account of Isaac and Ishmael is given, the term 'heathen baptism' (*baistedh Genntlidhi*) is applied to circumcision;‡ but this is an exceptional application : and the Irish ceremony was altogether different. The ancient Welsh people had also a heathen baptism : the Welsh hero Gwri of the Golden Hair, when an infant was "baptised with the baptism that was usual at that time."§ Possibly the heathen baptism of the Irish and Welsh was adopted by the druids of both nations in imitation of the Christian rite, by way of opposition to the new doctrines, devoting the child to the service of their own gods, which in the eyes of the Christian redactors of the tales, was equivalent to devoting him to the devil.

**Druids' Robes.**—The druids wore a white robe. We read in Tirechan's Notes that Amalgaid's druid, Rechrad, and his eight companions, on the occasion when they attempted to kill St. Patrick, were clad in white tunics :|| like the Gaulish druid, who, as Pliny states, wore a white robe when cutting the mistletoe from the oak with a knife of gold.¶

\* Rev. Celt., xiv. 28, 29 : Joyce, Old Celt. Romances, 402.

† Stokes, *Cóir Anmann*, 393 : see p. 150, *supra*.

‡ Zeitschr. für Celt. Phil., II. 52.

§ Rhys, Hibbert Lect., 499.

|| Trip. Life, 325, 326 : Hogan, Docum., 83.

¶ See De Jubainville, vi. 112.

**Trees revered.**—We know that the Gaulish druids regarded the oak, especially when mistletoe grew on it, with much religious veneration; but I cannot find that the Irish druids had any special veneration for the oak: although, like other trees, it occasionally figures in curious pagan rites. The mistletoe is not a native Irish plant: it was introduced some time in the last century. The statement we so often see put forward that the Irish druids held their religious meetings, and performed their solemn rites, under the sacred shade of the oak, is pure invention. But they attributed certain druidical or fairy virtues to the yew, the hazel, and the quicken or rowan-tree—especially the last—and employed them in many of their superstitious ceremonials. We have already seen (p. 230) that yew-rods were used in divination.

In the historic Tale of the Forbais Droma Damhghaire, or Siege of Knocklong, in the County Limerick, we read that when the northern and southern armies confronted each other, the druids on both sides made immense fires of quicken boughs. These were all cut by the soldiers with mysterious formalities, and the fires were lighted with great incantations. Each fire was intended to exercise a sinister influence on the opposing army; and from the movements of the smoke and flames the druids drew forecasts of the issue of the war.\* On some occasions, as we read, witches or druids, or malignant phantoms, cooked flesh—sometimes the flesh of dogs or horses—on quicken-tree spits, as part of a diabolical rite for the destruction of some person obnoxious to them.† Many of these superstitions have survived to our own day. The quicken is a terror to fairies, and counteracts their evil devices. Bring a quicken-tree walking-stick out at night, and the fairies will take care to give you a wide berth.‡ When a housewife is churning, if she puts a ring

\* O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, I. 213–216.

† See *Rev. Celt.*, VII. 301: and *Miss Hull, Cuch. Saga*, 254.

‡ See *Kilk. Arch. Journ.*, I. (1849–51) 353, 375.

made of a twig from this tree on the handle of the churn-dash, no evil-minded neighbour can rob her of her butter through any *pishoges* or other malign fairy influence.

**Druids as Teachers and Counsellors.**—A most important function of the druids was that of teaching: they were employed to educate the children of kings and chiefs—they were indeed the only educators; which greatly added to their influence. King Laegaire's two daughters were sent to live at Cruachan in Connaught in the house of the two druids who had charge of their education: and even St. Columba, when a child, began his education under a druid.

The chief druid of a king held a very influential position: he was the king's confidential adviser on important affairs. When King Concobar Mac Nessa contemplated avenging the foray of Queen Maive, he sought and followed the advice of his "right illustrious" druid Cathbad as to the time and manner of the projected expedition (Rossnaree, p. 9). And on St. Patrick's visit to Tara, King Laegaire's proceedings were entirely regulated by the advice of his two chief druids Lucetmail and Lochru.\* The great respect in which druids were held is illustrated by a passage in the *Mesca Ulad* in the Book of the Dun Cow, which tells us that at an assembly it was *geis* (i.e. it was forbidden) to the Ultonians to speak till their King Concobar had spoken first, and it was in like manner one of Concobar's *geasa* to speak before his druids. Accordingly, on a certain occasion at a feast, Concobar stood up from where he sat on his 'hero-seat' or throne, and there was instant silence, so that a needle falling from roof to floor would be heard: yet he too remained silent till his druid Cathbad asked:—"What is this, O illustrious king?"—after which, the king, taking this question as an invitation to speak, said what he had to say to the assembly (*Mesca*, 13).

\* Hogan, *Docum.*, 34, 35: *Trip. Life*, 43.



**Druidesses.**—The ancient Irish had druidesses also, like their relatives the Gauls. In the Rennes Dinnsenchus\* a druidess is called a *ban-druí*, i.e. a ‘woman-druid’; and many individual druidesses figure in the ancient writings. According to the same Dinnsenchus,† Brigit was a *ban-fili* (poetess) and *ban-druí*. These druidesses are also noticed in the ecclesiastical writings: as, for instance, in one of St. Patrick’s canons, where kings are warned to give no countenance to magi (i.e. ‘druids’), or *pythouesses*, or augurers, in which it is obvious from the connexion that the *pythouesses* were druidesses.‡ Amongst the dangers that St. Patrick (in his Hymn) asks God to protect him from are “the spells of women,” evidently druidesses. Many potent witches, called *ban-tuatha* and also *ban-sithe*, ‘fairy-women,’ figure in the tales, who were probably regarded as druidesses. Before the second Battle of Moytura the two *Ban-tuathaig* of the Dedannans promise to enchant (*Dolb-famíd*, ‘we will enchant’) “the trees and stones and sods” of the earth, so that they shall become a host [of men] “against them [the Fomorians enemies], and rout them.”§

## 2. *Points of Agreement and Difference between Irish and Gaulish Druids.*

**Chief Points of Agreement.**—1. They had the same Celtic name in both countries: “Druid.” 2. They were all wizards—magicians and diviners. 3. They were the only learned men of the time: they were judges, poets, professors of learning in general. 4. They were teachers, especially of the children of kings and chiefs. 5. Their disciples underwent a long course of training, during which they got by heart great numbers of verses. 6. They were the king’s chief advisers: they were very influential, and held in great respect, often taking precedence even of the kings.

\* Rev. Celt., xvi. 34.

† *Ibid.*, 277.

‡ Trip. Life, 507.

§ Rev. Celt., xii. 93. On druidesses see also O’Curry, Man. & Cust., i. 187: and De Jubainville, vi. 92.

7. Among both the Irish and Gauls there were druidesses.  
8. They had a number of gods. Cæsar gives the Gaulish gods the Roman names, Mercury, Jupiter, &c. : but these Roman names do not fit ; for the Gaulish gods were quite different from those of Rome and Greece, and had different names, and different functions. Many of the Irish gods, as will be shown farther on, were identical, both in name and chief functions, with those of Gaul.

**Chief Points of Difference.**—1. The Gaulish druids were under one head druid, with supreme authority : and they held periodical councils or synods. There was no such institution in Ireland : though there were eminent druids in various districts, with the influence usually accorded to eminence. 2. The Gaulish druids held the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, as applying to all mankind · the soul of every human being passing, after death, into other bodies, *i.e.* of men, not of the lower animals. There is no evidence, as will be shown at page 296, that the Irish druids held the souls of all men to be immortal. But in case of a few individuals—palpably exceptional—it is related that they lived on after death, some reappearing as other men, some as animals of various kinds, and a few lived on in Fairyland, without the intervention of death. 3. Human sacrifice was part of the rite of the Gaulish druids, sometimes an individual being sacrificed and slain : sometimes great numbers together. There is no record of any human sacrifice in connexion with the Irish druids : and there are good grounds for believing that direct human sacrifice was not practised at all in Ireland, as will be shown farther on in this chapter (p. 281). 4. The Gaulish druids prohibited their disciples from committing to writing any part of their lore, regarding this as an unhallowed practice. There is no mention of any such prohibition among Irish druids. 5. The Gaulish druids revered the oak, and the mistletoe when growing on it : the Irish druids revered the yew, the hazel, and the quicken-tree or rowan-tree :

but not the oak. 6. The Gaulish druids, as we are informed, were priests: the Irish druids were not: they were merely wizards and learned men. 7. A point of difference regarding druidic literature that ought to be noticed is this:—That while all our knowledge regarding the Gaulish and British druids is derived from Latin and Greek writers, there being no native accounts—or next to none—our information about Irish druids comes from native Irish sources, and none from foreign writers.\*

### 3. *Sorcerers and Sorcery.*

“**One foot, one hand, one eye.**”—Spells of several kinds are often mentioned in our ancient writings, as practised by various people, not specially or solely by druids. But all such rites and incantations, by whomsoever performed—magical practices of every kind—are known by the general name of *druidecht*, i.e. ‘*druidism*,’ indicating that all proceeded from the druids. Some of the most important of them will be described here.

A common name for a sorcerer of any kind, whether druid or not, was *corrguinech*, and the art he practised—the art of sorcery—was *corrguinecht*. The explanation of these *corrguinechs* as ‘folks of might,’ given in the story of the Battle of Moytura (Rev. Celt., XII., p. 77), shows the popular estimation in which they were held. Usually while practising his spell, the *corrguinech* was “on one foot, one hand, and one eye,” which, I suppose, means standing on one foot, with one arm outstretched, and with one eye shut. While in this posture, he uttered a kind of incantation or curse, called *glám dichenn*, commonly extempore, which was intended to inflict injury on the maledicted person or persons. It was chanted in a loud voice, as the word *glám* indicates, meaning, according to Cormac’s

\* On the question of the Celtic druids see De Jubainville, *La Civilis. des Celtes*, p. 147: and for Irish druids read O’Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, Lects. ix. and x. See also Harris’s *Ware, Antiqq.*, chapter xvi.

Glossary (p. 87), 'clamour' or 'outcry.' O'Davoren, in his Glossary, defines *corrguinecht* as "to be on one foot, on one hand, and on one eye, making the *glám dichenn*."\* The term '*glám dichenn*' was often applied to the *aer* or satire of a poet; and in this sense it will be again noticed (p. 452).

There are many notices of the exercise, by druids or others, of this necromantic function. Just before the second battle of Moytura, Lug of the long arms—the *Ildana* or 'master of many arts,' as he was called—the commander of the Dedannans, having made an encouraging speech to his men, went round the army, using one foot and one eye, (*one hand* not mentioned here) chanting, at the same time, some sort of incantation.† The "Bruden Da Derga," relates how, when King Conari was on his way to the Bruden, he was overtaken by two rough monstrous big-mouthed misshapen goblins, man and wife, the man—whose name was Fer-Caille ("Man of the wood")—"with his one hand, and one eye, and one foot," carrying a great black, squealing hog on his back. And just before the tragedy in which this king was slain, a horrible spectral-looking woman came, and, standing at the door of the house, she croaked out some sort of incantation "on one foot, one hand, and one breath."‡ When the Fomorian chief Cicul and his mother arrived in Ireland with three hundred men to contend with the Parthalonians, they came "on one of the legs, on one of the hands, and one of the eyes" (*for oencosaib ocus for oenlamaib ocus oensúilib*), in pursuance of some malign magical intentions.§

This posture was often adopted in other ceremonies besides the *glám dichenn*. Cuculainn, on one occasion, wishing to send a mystic message to Maive's opposing army, cut an oak sapling while using one foot, one hand,

\* Stokes, *Three Irish Glossaries*, 63.

† *Rev. Celt.*, xii. 99.

‡ *Da Derga*, 41 and 59.

§ *Rev. Celt.*, xv. 432. For an instance in a late ms., see *Oss. Soc. Trans.*, II. 140, §: where, however, the editor misunderstands and mistranslates the passage.



and one eye ; and bending the sapling into a ring, he cut an ogham on it, and left it tightly fitted on the top of a pillar-stone. It was a necessary part of this rite that the sapling should be severed and its top sheared off with a single sweep of the sword. One of Maive's people found it and read the ogham, which placed an injunction on them not to move the army from camp, till one of them, going through the same process, placed a twig-ring with a reply in ogham on the same pillar-stone.\*

Some obscure allusions in old writings show that sorcerers threw themselves into other strange attitudes in the practice of their diabolical art. When the druids came against St. Caillin, they advanced on all fours, and *cuirid a tona suas*, " they turn up their backsides " (ponent podices eorum sursum) ; and their jaws " move angrily, and they unjustly revile the clerics " (probably with a *glám dichenn*) : and the legend goes on to say that for this profanity the saint turned them into standing stones.† Perhaps a circumstance related in the " Wars of the Gaels with the Galls " has some connexion with this rite. When King Mahon, after the Battle of Sulcoit (A.D. 968), took the Danes of Limerick captive, the victorious Irish celebrated some sort of races or games by placing " a great line " of the women of the foreigners on the little hills of Sing-land in a circle, and they were stooped with their hands " on the ground ; and the *gillies* of the army, standing behind them, marshalled them, for the good of the souls " of the foreigners who were killed in the battle."‡ But the whole entry, which seems an odd mixture of paganism and Christianity, is quite obscure, so that Todd professes himself unable to explain it.

**Imbas Forosnai ; Teinm Laegda ; and Dichetal do chennaib.**—In Cormac's Glossary and other authorities, the three rites with these names are mentioned as rendering

\* Miss Hull, Cuch. Saga, 128, 129 : LL, 58, a, 40.

† Book of Fenagh, 129.

‡ Wars of GG, 83 ; and Introd., cxxii.

a poet (*filí*) prophetic. *Imbas Forosnai*, 'illumination between the hands,' or 'palm-knowledge of enlightening,' was so called, says the Glossary (p. 94), because "it discovers everything which the poet wishes and which he desires to manifest." The Glossary goes on to describe the manner of performing the rite:—"The poet chewed a piece of the flesh of a red pig, or of a dog, or of a cat, and then placing it on a flagstone, pronounced an incantation over it, and offered it to idol-gods: then he calls his idol-gods to him, but finds them not on the morrow [*i.e.* he takes them to himself, and they disappear during his sleep]; and he pronounces incantations on his two palms, and calls again unto him his idol-gods, that his sleep may not be disturbed; and he lays his two palms on his two cheeks and [in this position] falls asleep: and he is watched in order that no one may disturb him." During his sleep the future events were revealed to him; and he awakened up with a full knowledge of them. According to the Glossary, the rite was called *imbas*, from *bas*, 'the palm of the hand.' The *Teinm Laegda* was used for a like purpose; "but the two rites were performed after a different manner: *i.e.* a different kind of offering was made at each" (Br. Laws, I. 45). De Jubainville (VI. 89-91) shows that a similar, though somewhat less complicated, rite was practised by the Greeks and Romans, and by some eastern people.

Cormac's Glossary and other old authorities state that St. Patrick abolished the *Imbas Forosnai* and the *Teinm Laegda*, because they required offerings to be made to idols or demons; but he permitted the *Dichetal do chennaib*, "because it is not necessary in it to make any offerings to demons." This *Dichetal do chennaib* was simply the utterance of an extempore prophecy or poem without any previous rite. It seems to have been accomplished with the aid of a harmless mnemonic contrivance of some kind, in which the fingers played a principal part, and

by which the poet was enabled to pour forth his verses extemporaneously. That this was the case appears both from its name and from the descriptions given in the old authorities. *Dichetal do chennaib* signifies 'recital from the ends,' *i.e.* the ends of the fingers, as is evident from Cormac's Glossary (p. 95):—"There is a revelation at once from the ends of the bones"—*do chennaib cnáime*. So also, in the Small Primer, it is said that the poet repeats his verses "without having meditated, or even thought of them before" (Br. Laws, v. 59, 4). Again, in the *Senchus Mór*, we read that the poet "composes from the enlightening [finger-] ends" (*forcan di cendaib forosna*): on which the Commentator says:—"At this day [*i.e.* in the time of the "Commentator] it is by the ends of his [finger-] bones he "effects it; . . . and the way in which it is done is this:—"When the poet sees the person or thing before him, he "makes a verse at once with the ends of his fingers, or in "his mind without studying, and he composes and repeats "at the same time."\* All this agrees with the statement in Cormac's Glossary:—" *Dichetal do chennaib* was left [by "Patrick], for it is science [*i.e.* mere intellectual effort—"not necromancy] that effects it."†

Notwithstanding St. Patrick's prohibition, the whole three rites continued to be practised down to a comparatively late period, as the forms of many other pagan rites lived on in spite of the efforts of the Christian clergy. The Book of Ollaves lays down as one of the requirements of an Anruth poet in his eighth year that he must master the *Imbas Forosnai*, the *Teinm Laegda*, and the *Dichetal do chennaib* (see chap. xi., p. 433, farther on). In confirmation of this, we find it stated in a late historical record

\* Br. Laws, i. 40, 45.

† Stokes, Trip. Life, 571. Mrs. Hall, who knew nothing of the *Dichetal do Chennaib*, describes (in the year 1841) how the illiterate old market-woman Moll Miskellagh, when sent to town to purchase and bring home numerous articles, fixed them all in her memory, by means of her fingers (Irish Penny Journal, p. 410, 2nd column).

that a council was called by Donall O'Neill, king of Ulster, in the eleventh century, to make reparation for an injury inflicted on the poet Erard Mac Cosse by some Ulster chiefs : and another great scholar, Flann of Monasterboice, as the mouthpiece of the council, assessed certain damages to be paid to Mac Cosse, and, in future, to all other poets for similar injury, provided they were able to compose the *Imbas Forosnai*, the *Teinm Laegda*, and the *Dichetai do chennaib*.\* Here, however, these functions seem to have been mere literary performances, without any invocation to idols or demons, or any touch of necromancy ; so that, like many other heathen practices continued into Christian times, they lost their pagan taint, and became harmless.

**Bull Feast.**—The ancient Irish practised a rite called the “ Bull feast ” to discover who their future king was to be, not much unlike the *Imbas Forosnai*. This is described more than once in the Book of the Dun Cow :—“ A white “ bull was killed, and one man ate enough of its flesh, and “ drank of the broth : and he slept under that meal ; and “ a spell of truth was chanted over him [as he slept in his “ bed] by four druids : and he saw in a dream the shape “ and description of the man who should be made king, “ and the sort of work he was [at the moment] engaged “ in.”† Another account says “ the sleeper would perish if he uttered a falsehood.”‡ Dr. Stokes points out that, in Achaia, the priestess of the earth drank the fresh blood of a bull before descending into the cave to prophesy.

**Dicheltair : Fe-fiada.**—The druids and other “ men of might ” could make a magic mantle that rendered its wearer invisible : called a *celtar* [keltar] or *dicheltair* (something that covers or conceals, from *cel* or *ceil*, ‘ conceal ’), and often *celtar comga*, ‘ mantle of concealment.’ Cuculainn once, going into battle, put on his *celtar comga*, which was

\* O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, I. 135.

† Sick Bed, *Atlantis*, I. 385 : *Ir. Texte*, I. 213.

‡ Stokes, *Da Derga*, 23.



part of the raiment of *Tir Tairngire* or Fairyland, and which had been given him by his tutor of druidism (*aiti druidechta*).<sup>\*</sup> In an Irish version of the Aeneid, the writer, having in his mind the native Irish legend, tells us that when Venus was guiding Aeneas and his companions to Dido's city, she put a *dichealtair* round them, so that they went unseen till they arrived within the city:† just as Athene threw a mist of invisibility round Ulysses as he entered the city of the Phæaceans (Odyss. vii.).

Druids and others could raise or produce a *Fe-fiada* or *Feth-fiada*,‡ which rendered people invisible. The accounts that have reached us of this *Fe-fiada* are very confused and obscure. Sometimes it appears to be a poetical incantation, or even a Christian hymn, which rendered the person that repeated it invisible. Often it is a mantle: occasionally a magic fog or spell that hid natural objects—such an object as a well—and that might be removed by Christian influences. Every *shee* or fairy palace had a *Fe-fiada* round it, which shut it out from mortal vision.§ The *Fe-fiada* and the *dicheltair* held their ground far into Christian times, and even found their way into the legends of the saints. St. Patrick's well-known hymn was a *Fe-fiada*, and it is openly called so in old authorities: for it made Patrick and his company, as they went towards Tara, appear as a herd of deer to those who lay in wait to slay them. At the Battle of Clontarf (1014), the banshee Eevin—according to a modern manuscript account—gave the Dalcassian hero Dunlang O'Hartigan a mantle, called a *feadh Fia*, which, so long as he wore it, made him invisible, and protected him from harm during

<sup>\*</sup> Kilk. Arch. Journ., 1870-71, 425, 24; 427, 6: LL, 77, b, 20.

† Zeitschr. für Celt. Phil., II. 431.

‡ This charm, with its name *Feth-fiada*—as will be mentioned farther on (p. 386, note)—is still prevalent in Scotland, though the name has been long forgotten in Ireland. See *Fe Fiada* in Index.

§ See Todd, Book of Fermoy, 46, 48: O'Curry, Sons of Usna—Atlantis, III. 386: Trip. Life, 47: Silva Gad., 228.

the battle ; but when he threw it off he was slain.\* When the king of Fermoy pursued St. Finnochua's mother to kill her—as we read in the Life of this saint—a “ cloak of darkness ” (*celtchair dhichlethi*) was put round her by miraculous Christian intervention, so that she escaped.† It would appear from many passages that anything producing invisibility, whether mantle, fog, incantation, or hymn, was called by the general name *Fe-fiada*.

When the *Fe-fiada* was a fog, it was more commonly called *ceó druidechta* [dreeghta : *ceó*, pron. kyo, one syll.], the ‘ druidical or magic fog ’ ; which very often figures in Irish romances and songs, both ancient and modern. In the *Fled Bricrenn* we read that a *ceó druidechta* once overtook Laegaire the Victorious, and on the same occasion another came upon Conall Cernach, “ so that he was unable to see heaven or earth.”‡ When the Dedannans invaded Ireland, they marched inland till they reached Slieve-an-Ierin, covering themselves with a magic fog, so that the Firbolgs never perceived them till they had taken up a strong position. This concealing fog is also found in Christian legends. In the story of the Boroma in the Book of Leinster, it is related that on one occasion, when St. Molling and his companions were pursued by a hostile party, his friend Mothairén, who was far away from him at the time, having, in some preternatural way, been made aware of his danger, prayed that a fog (*ceó* simply : not called a *ceó druidechta*) might be sent round them : and straightway a fog came and enveloped them, though they themselves did not perceive it, so that they were quite hidden from the view of their enemies, and succeeded in escaping.§

**Various Spells.**—Spells and charms of various other kinds were practised. A general name for a charm was

\* Oss. Soc. Trans., II. 101 : see Joyce, Short Hist. of Ireland, p. 219, note, for the story of Dunlang.

† Fled Bricrenn, 45, 49.

‡ Stokes, Lives of SS., 232.

§ Silva Gad., 423.

*sén* [shain] : *sénaire* [three syllables], a 'charmer.' Among the offences mentioned in the *Senchus Mór* for which a penalty was due is "carrying love-charms": which are there called *auptha*: other forms of the word are *uptha*, *eptha*, and *iptha*. In the Gloss on this passage are given two other names for a charm—*felmas* and *pisóc*. This last is still in use, even among English-speaking people, in the modern form *pisecóg* (pron. pishoge), and familiarly applied to witchcraft or spells. *Fidlann*, which occurs in the "Second Vision of Adamnan," denoted some kind of necromantic divination, which was, perhaps, done by lot-casting, as the first syllable, *fid*, means 'wood,' or 'anything made of wood': or, as Stokes suggests,\* by cutting ogham on a yew-rod, as described at p. 230, *supra*. In Cuimmin's poem on the Irish saints *éile* [aila] is given to denote a spell-chant or charm. The Dedannan god Lug, already mentioned (p. 241) as singing an incantation before the Battle of Moytura, is brought forward in the *Táin* as in conversation with Cuculainn, and utters another incantation, which is called, on the margin of the page (78, a) of the Book of the Dun Cow, *éli Loga*, 'Lug's *éli* or chant.'†

#### 4. *Mythology: Gods, Goblins, and Phantoms.*

**Names for God.**—In the Irish language there are several names for God in general, without reference to any particular god: and it will be convenient to bring them all together here, whether in Christian or pagan connexion. The most general is *dia* (gen. *dé*), which, with some variations in spelling, is common to many of the Aryan languages. It was used in pagan as well as in Christian times, and is the Irish word in universal use at the present day for God. The word *fiadu* (gen. *fiadat*) is sometimes

\* Rev. Celt., xii. 440.

† For other examples of *éli*, see Stokes in *Zeitschr. für Celt. Phil.*, i. 72: and for a horrible pagan rite with dead men's marrow, practised even in Christian times, apparently with the sanction of the Brehon Law, see Br. Laws, i. 203.

used for 'Lord' or 'God,' for which see Windisch, *Wörterbuch*, and Stokes's *Lives*, cv. *Art* is explained in Cormac's Glossary (p. 3) as meaning 'God.' Another name was *Dess*: the lady Emer, as we read in "The Courtship of Emer," in the Book of the Dun Cow, on seeing Cuculainn, saluted him with the words, "May *Dess* make smooth the path before thee"; and in the old text (LU, 122, b, 33), *Dess* is explained by *Dia*, 'God,' written in between the lines. This word *Dess* must have been old and obscure when the book was copied (A.D. 1100), inasmuch as the writer thought it necessary to explain it: and he considered that it was obscure even at the supposed time of the meeting, for Cuculainn and Emer carried on their conversation in intentionally obscure words—of which *Dess* was one—that the hearers might not understand them. In an old Glossary (the *Duil Laithne*) in the handwriting of Duaid Mac Firbis, as quoted by Stokes,\* three other ancient Irish names for God are given, and all explained by *Dia*:—*Teo*, *Tiamud*, and *Daur*. The word *Comdiu*, or *Coimdiu* (gen. *Comded*) is often used in old writings for 'Master,' 'God,' the 'God-head,' the 'Lord,' and I think always in connexion with Christianity: but it has long fallen into disuse. Lastly *Tigerna* [terna] means 'Lord.' It was originally, and is still, applied to an earthly lord; but, like the English word 'Lord,' was often used to designate God, as it is to this day. There was a Gaulish god, *Esus*, whose worship, though at one time pretty widely spread, appears never to have reached Ireland, as his name does not appear in Irish writings.

**Gods in General.**—In Irish literature, both lay and ecclesiastical, we sometimes find vague references to the pagan gods in general terms, without any hint as to their identity or functions. The "gods" are often referred to

\* In *Rev. Celt.*, I. 259.



in oaths and asseverations : and such expressions as the following are constantly put into the mouths of the heroes of the Red Branch :—" I swear by the gods that my people swear by " (*Tonga na dea thungus mo thuath*) : " I swear to god what my tribe swears " (*Tongu do dia tonges mo thuath*) : " I swear by my gods whom I adore " (*Do thung mo deo dan adraim*). Muirchu, in his short Latin Life of St. Patrick, written near the end of the seventh century, informs us that when King Laegaire [Leary] was setting out for Slane, on Easter Eve, A.D. 433, to arrest St. Patrick, he ordered nine chariots to be joined together, " according to the tradition of the gods."\* All this would seem to imply that—as already remarked (p. 220)—we are not in possession of full information regarding pagan Irish worship : that there is something behind those observances which we know nothing of.

**Individual Gods.**—But we have a number of individual gods of very distinct personality, who figure in the romantic literature, some beneficent and some evil. The names of many of them have been identified with those of ancient Gaulish gods,† a thing that might be anticipated, inasmuch as the Gaelic people of Ireland and Scotland are a branch of the Celts or Gauls' of the Continent, and brought with them, at their separation from the main stock, the language, the traditions, and the mythology of their original home.

**Shee or Fairies.**—The pagan Irish worshipped the *side* [shee,] *i.e.* the earth-gods, or fairies, or elves. In proof of this, many passages might be cited from both the lay and the ecclesiastical literature : but perhaps the most precise statement, as well as the oldest, occurs in Fiacc's Hymn to St. Patrick :—" Till the apostle [Patrick] came to them, darkness lay on Ireland's folk : the tribes worshipped the

\* Hogan, Docum., 234.

† For examples, see Kilk. Arch. Journ., 1868, p. 319 : Stokes, Three Irish Glossaries, xxxiii : and Rhys, Hibb. Lectures (Lects. I. and II.)

*side* "\*" A part of this worship was intended for the fairies collectively, and a part was often meant for individuals, who will be named as we go along. These *side* are closely mixed up with the mythical race called *Tuatha* [Too-ha] *dea Danann*, or, more shortly, Dedannans, to whom the great majority of the fairy gods belonged: and it will be proper to give here some information regarding both combined.†

The name *Tuatha Dea Danann* signifies the *tuatha*, or people of the goddess Danu or Danann, who was the "mother of the gods," and who will be found mentioned farther on. According to our bardic chroniclers the Dedannans were the fourth of the prehistoric colonies that arrived in Ireland many centuries before the Christian era.‡ They were great magicians, and were highly skilled in science and metal-working. After inhabiting Ireland for about two hundred years, they were conquered by the people of the fifth and last colony—the Milesians. When they had been finally defeated in two decisive battles, they held secret council, and arranged that the several chiefs, with their followers, were to take up their residence in the pleasant hills all over the country—the *side* [shee] or elf-mounds—where they could live free from observation or molestation. A detailed account of their final dispersion is given in the Book of Fermoy, a manuscript copied from older books in 1463, where it is related that the Dedannans, after two disastrous battles, held a meeting at Brugh, on the Boyne, under the presidency of Mannanan Mac Lir (p. 258, *infra*); and by his advice they distributed and quartered themselves on the pleasant hills and plains of Erin. Bodb Derg [Bove Derg,] son of the Dagda

\* Trip. Life, 409.

† For further information, see Comyn's Keat., 203: Hyde, Lit. Hist., 51: Joyce, Old Celtic Romances, 427: Ogyg., III. xxii: and Joyce, Short Hist. of Ire., 125.

‡ For the legend of their arrival and rule in Ireland, see Joyce's Keating, 109 to end.

(p. 260, *infra*), was chosen king ; and Mannanan arranged the different dwelling-places among the hills for the nobles. Deep under ground in these abodes they built themselves glorious palaces, all ablaze with light, and glittering with gems and gold. Sometimes their palaces were situated under wells or lakes, or under the sea.\*

A different account is given in a much more ancient authority, the eighth or ninth century tale called *Mesca Ulad* (p. 3), in the Book of Leinster, which recounts that after the battles, Amergin, the Milesian brehon, was called on to divide Erin between the conquering and the conquered races ; “ and he gave the part of Erin that was “ underground to the [*spiritual*] Dedannans, and the other “ part to his own *corporeal* people, the sons of Miled ; after “ which the Dedannans went into hills and fairy-palaces,” and became gods. But it is to be observed that individuals belonging to other races—as, for instance, some of the Milesian chiefs—became fairy-gods, and dwelt in the *side* (for which see p. 261, *infra*). In a passage in one tale even the Fomorians are said to be dwellers in the *side*.† The *side* seem, indeed, to have been looked upon as the home of many classes of supernatural beings, as in the case of the Morrighu mentioned below, who is stated to have come out of the elf-mounds (*a sídaib*).

In one of the stories of the Táin, as well as in other tales, we meet with a statement in connexion with the Dedannans which is somewhat obscure. On one occasion Cuculainn, being tired and thirsty after a fight, comes to an old woman (who was the *morrighu* in disguise, and had come out of the *side*), milking a cow, and asked her for a drink. And when she had given it to him, he said :—“ The blessing of the *dee* and of the *an-dee* be upon thee ” (*dee*, ‘ gods ’ ; *an-dee*, ‘ non-gods ’) : and this explanatory note is added in the LL text :—“ The *dee* were the

\* Under a well : see Ir. Texte, III. 209.

† Rev. Celt., XII. 73 : Hyde, Lit. Hist., 287.

"magicians [*aes-cumachta*, 'folk of power'], and the "*an-dee* were the husbandmen [*aes-trebaire*, 'folk of ploughing'].)\* The same incident is related in the *Cóir Anmann*:† and here the *dee* or gods are in one place said to be the magicians, and a little farther on they are given as the poets (*aes-dána*): thus identifying the poets with the magicians. Probably *dee* in this and other like passages meant simply the druids or magicians, who were also poets, and the *an-dee*, the ordinary people or laity.

Many passages from old Irish authorities might be cited to show that the Dedannans were identified with the *side* or fairies. In the Story of the Children of Lir, the two sons of the Dedannan King Bodb [Bove] Derg are represented as riding forward at the head of a party of their own people, who are called *Marcra Side*, the 'cavalcade of the *side* or fairies.' And in an ancient manuscript copy of *Senchus na Relec*, or "History of the Cemeteries," the following statement occurs relating to the death of King Cormac Mac Art:—"Or it was the *siabra* " [sheevra, 'a kind of fairies'] that killed him, *i.e.* the "*Tuatha De Dannans*, for they were called *siabra*."‡ In a poem in the Book of the Dun Cow, Midir, a noted fairy chief, who had his *side* or palace under the hill now called Slieve Golry, near Ardagh, in Longford, is called "Midir of the Tuatha De Dannan race."§

But an older race of *side* or earth-gods, the local gods of the aboriginal inhabitants, whoever they may have been, existed in the country before the deification of the Dedannans: and with these the Dedannans became mixed up and confounded. This fact did not escape the notice of O'Curry, who puts it very clearly in an Appendix to one of his Lectures:|| and there is a plain recognition of

\* LL, 75, b, 32; Hull, Cuch. Saga, 169: Hyde, Lit. Hist., 286.

† Ir. Texte, III. 355.

‡ Petrie, Round Towers, 98, note d.

§ O'Curry, Man. & Cust., I. 71, last line.

|| MS. Mat., Appendix XXI., p. 504.



the existence of older gods in many passages of the ancient authorities. One of the oldest, the Mesca Ulad,\* after describing the arrangement already noticed, by which the Dedannans were assigned the underground dwellings, goes on to say :—" The Tuatha De Danann [then] went "into hills and fairy-palaces (*sidbrugaib*), so that they "spoke with *side* under ground " : implying the previous existence of the *side*. And in another very old authority, the Story of the Sick-bed of Cuculainn, the Dedannans are represented as on several occasions visiting the palaces of the previous existing fairies. But in course of time the distinction between the Dedannans and their predecessors became lost, so that it will not be necessary to refer to it again, and the *side* or fairies will be treated as if all of one race.

**Dwellings of Fairies.**—In accordance with all these ancient accounts it was universally believed that the fairies dwelt in habitations in the interior of pleasant hills, which were called by the name of *side* [shee]. Colgan's explanation of this term gives an admirable epitome of the superstition respecting the *side* and its inhabitants :—" Fantastical spirits are by the Irish called men of the " *side*, because they are seen, as it were, to come out of " beautiful hills to infest people ; and hence the vulgar " belief that they reside in certain subterraneous habita- " tions within these hills ; and these habitations, and " sometimes the hills themselves, are called by the Irish " *side*."† Here it will be observed that the word *side* is applied to the fairies themselves as well as to their abodes. And *shee*, as meaning a fairy, is perfectly understood still. When you see a little whirl of dust moving along the road on a fine calm day, that is called a *shee-geeha* (Ir. *side gaeithe*), ' wind fairies,' travelling from one *lis*

\* Mesca, p. 3 : LL, 261, b, '33.

† This superstition about fairy hills also prevails in Scotland : Rob Roy, chap. xxviii. and note H.

or elf-mound to another : and it will be better to get out of the way.

In Colgan's time the fairy superstition had descended to the common people—the *vulgus* ; for the spread of the faith, and the influence of education, had disenthralled the minds of the higher classes. But in the fifth century, the existence of the *Daoine síde* [deena-shee, ' people of the fairy mansions ' ] was an article of belief with the high as well as with the low ; as may be inferred from the following curious passage in the Book of Armagh (eighth century), where we find the two daughters of Laegaire



FIG. 73.

A fairy hill ; an earthen mound at Highwood, near Lough Arrow, in Co. Sligo.

[Leary], king of Ireland, participating in this superstition :—" Then St. Patrick came to the well which is called "*Clebach*, on the side of *Cruachan*, towards the east ; and " before sunrise they [Patrick and his companions] sat " down near the well. And lo, the two daughters of " King Laegaire, Ethnea the fair and Fedelma the ruddy, " came early to the well to wash their hands, as was their " custom : and they found near the well a synod of holy " bishops with Patrick. And they knew not whence they " came, or from what people, or from what country : but " supposed them to be *fir síde*, or gods of the earth, or a " phantasm."\*

\* Trip. Life, 99, 314 : Todd, St. Patrick, 452.

The ideas prevalent in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries as to what the people's beliefs were regarding the fairies before the time of St. Patrick, are well set forth in the concluding paragraph of the tale of "The Sick Bed of Cuculainn" in the Book of the Dun Cow :—  
 "For the demoniac power was great before the faith: and  
 "such was its greatness that the demons used to corpo-  
 "really tempt the people, and they used to shew them  
 "delights and secrets, such as how they might become  
 "immortal. And it was to these phantoms the ignorant  
 "used to apply the name *side*."\*

Numbers of fairy hills and sepulchral cairns, not only those enumerated in the Book of Fermoy, but many others,



FIG. 74.

Fairy moat at Patrickstown, near Oldcastle, County Meath.  
 (From Journ. Soc. Antiqq. Ire., 1898.)

are scattered over the country, each with a bright palace deep underneath, ruled by its own chief, the tutelary deity. They are still regarded as fairy haunts, and are held in much superstitious awe by the peasantry.

**Nature and Powers of the Fairies.**—Fairies, as they are depicted for us in the old writings, occupied an intermediate position between spiritual and corporeal beings. In some passages of the tales, especially those relating to the pagan heaven which they inhabited, they are spoken of as immortal: and they drank of Manannan Mac Lir's ale, and ate of the flesh of his swine, which preserved them from old age, decay, and death. But in other passages they are made subject to death, after living an immensely long time. They are often presented to us like men and women, and they are sometimes married to mortals. Men fought battles against fairies, and hacked and killed

\* Sick Bed: Atlantis, II. 124.

them, and occasionally attacked their palaces : the *shee* or fairy-palace of Croghan was on one occasion attacked and plundered by Ailill and Maive.\* Sometimes the fairies fought among themselves. In the Rennes Dinnsenchus it is related that two opposing parties of *fir-side* [fir-shee : 'fairy-men'] quarrelled, and fought it out in the shapes of deer on the plain of Moenmagh ; and mounds were made of the hoofs and antlers that had been knocked off.† Occasionally one party of fairies engaged mortal chiefs to aid them in their wars against fairy adversaries.

The fairies possessed great preternatural powers. They could make themselves invisible to some persons standing by, while visible to others : as Pallas showed herself to Achilles, while remaining invisible to the other Greeks (Iliad, 1). But their powers were exercised much oftener for evil than for good. They were consequently dreaded rather than loved ; and the respect paid to them was mainly intended to avert mischief. In this same spirit too they are now commonly called "the good people." They could wither up the crops over a whole district, or strike cattle with disease.‡ The belief that the illness of cattle was sometimes due to fairy malignity found its way even into the Senchus Mór, in which is mentioned cattle as killed by fairy plague, which the gloss explains as a broken or diseased kidney.§ The women from the fairy hills struck Cuculainn with little rods which brought on an illness that nearly killed him ;|| and many other examples of similar infliction occur in the tales. To this day the

\* For various mortal qualities attributed to fairies, see Todd, Book of Fermoy, 46, 47. O'Curry, Usna, 388, note 16 : Voyage of Bran, II. 189, 195, 196 : Ventry, xiv. : Stokes, Lives of SS., xxxiv. : O'Grady, Silva Gad., 280, 290.

† Rev. Celt., xvi. 274. The fights of fairies among themselves have given names to places : as Lisnascragh, 'the fairy-fort of the shrieking' : for which, and for the prevalence of the superstition at the present day, see Joyce's Names of Places, I. 192.

‡ Voyage of Bran, II. 188.

§ Br. Laws, II. 239.

|| Sick Bed : Atlantis, I. 389.



peasantry have a lurking belief that cattle and human beings who interfere with the haunted old *lisses* or forts, are often fairy-struck, which brings on paralysis or other dangerous illness, or death. I knew one noted case.

A brief account of a few of the leading Dedannan and other fairy gods will now be given. Sometimes they are spoken of as gods: sometimes they are regarded as great men, who ultimately came to be looked upon as gods. But this same uncertainty—whether pantheon deities are gods or men, or the tendency to regard them as great men who became deified—is found in the mythology of Greece, and, indeed, in that of all other ancient nations.\*

**Manannan Mac Lir**, whose epithet *Mac Lir* signifies 'Son of the Sea' (*ler*, 'sea'; gen. *lir*), was the Irish sea-god. He is usually represented in the old tales as riding on the sea, in a chariot, at the head of his followers. When Bran the son of Febal had been at sea two days and two nights, "he saw a man in a chariot coming towards him over the sea," who turns out to be Manannan Mac Lir, and who, as he passed, spoke in verse, and said that the sea to him was a beautiful flowery plain:—

"What is a clear sea  
For the prowed skiff in which Bran is,  
That is to me a happy plain with profusion of flowers,  
[Looking] from the chariot of two wheels."†

This latter part of the old account has been adopted in the legends of the Saints. St. Scuithin, or Scotinus, used to walk over the sea to Rome in a day, and return the next day. Once, when he was thus skimming along like the wind, he met St. Finnbarr, of Cork, who was in a ship: and Finnbarr asked him why he was travelling over the sea in that manner. Scuithin promptly replied that it was

\* For a full account of the Dedannan gods, and a comparison of their correspondence with the deified heroes of the Greeks and other ancient nations, see *Le Cycle Mythologique: De Jubainville, Cours, Litt. Celt.*, II.

† Voyage of Bran, I., 16, 18; 39, note 32.

not the sea at all, "but a flowery shamrock-bearing plain : and here is a proof of it," said he—extending his hand into the sea—"and he took up therefrom a bunch of purple flowers and cast it to Finnbarr into the ship." But "Finnbarr [to disprove Scuithin's statement] also "stretched his hand into the water, from which he took "up a salmon, and cast it to Scuithin."\* And so the dispute between the two good saints remained undecided.

Manannan is still vividly remembered in some parts of Ireland. He is in his glory on a stormy night : and on such a night, when you look over the sea, there before your eyes, in the dim gloom, are thousands of Manannan's white-maned steeds, careering along after the great chief's chariot. One of the islands of the pagan heaven is described in the Voyage of Bran (I. 4) as "an isle round which sea-horses glisten." According to an oral tradition, prevalent in the Isle of Man and in the eastern counties of Leinster (brought from Leinster to Man by the early emigrants : p. 79, *supra*) Manannan had three legs, on which he rolled along on land, wheel-like, always surrounded by a *ceo-draoidheachta*, or 'magic mist' (p. 247, *supra*) : and this is the origin of the three-legged figure on the Manx halfpenny. In Cormac's Glossary (p. 114) he is brought down to the level of a mere man—a successful merchant—who afterwards became deified :—"Manannan "Mac Lir, a celebrated merchant, who was [*i.e.* took up "his abode] in the Isle of Mann. He was the best pilot "that was in the west of Europe. He used to know, by "studying the sky, the period which would be the fine "weather and the bad weather, and when each of these "two times would change. Hence the Irish and the "Britons call him the 'God of the Sea,' and also *Mac Lir*, "i.e. the 'Son of the Sea.' And from the name of "Manannan the Isle of Mann is so called." But the *Cóir Anmann* (p. 357), which, however, is scarcely so old an

\* O'Clery's Cal., 5.

authority, says the reverse :—" He was called Manannan from [the Isle of] Mann."

**The Dagda** was a powerful and beneficent god, who ruled as king over Ireland for eighty years. He was sometimes called *Ruad-Rofhessa* [Roo-ro-essa], the 'lord (*ruad*) of great knowledge' (*ro*, 'great'; *fiss*, gen. *fessa*, 'knowledge'), for "'tis he that had the perfection of the heathen science"; and also *Mac na n-uile n-dána*, 'the Son of all the Sciences' (*uile* or *nile*, 'all'; *dán*, 'science').\* He seems to have made an ill-assorted marriage; for, according to Cormac's Glossary (p. 90), his wife was known by three names—*Breg*, *Meng*, and *Meaba!*, i.e. 'Lie,' 'Guile,' and 'Disgrace.'

**Bodb Derg** [Bove-Derg], son of the Dagda, had his residence—called *Síde Buidb* [Shee Boov]—on the shore of Lough Derg, somewhere near Portumna. Several hills in Ireland, noted as fairy-haunts, took their names from him, and others from his daughter *Bugh* [Boo].

**Aengus Mac-in-Og** [Oge], another son of the Dagda, was a mighty magician—in the Wooing of Emer he is called a god—whose splendid palace at "Brugh of the Boyne" was within the great sepulchral mound of Newgrange, near Drogheda.†

**Brigit**, daughter of the Dagda, was the goddess of Poets, of Poetry, and of Wisdom. "This," says Cormac's Glossary (23), "is Brigit the female sage, or woman of wisdom—that is, Brigit the goddess, whom poets adored, because "her protecting care [over them] was very great and very "famous." Cormac fancifully interprets her name as meaning "fiery arrow" (Irish, *Breo-Shaiget*). She had two sisters, also called Brigit: one was the goddess of Medicine and medical doctors; the other the goddess of

\* Corm. Gloss., 144: Ir. Texte, III. 357: LL, 188, a, 2. Pronounce this long epithet *Mac-nan-ulla-nauna*.

† For the splendours of this palace, see Joyce, *Old Celtic Romances*, p. 186.

smiths and smithwork. The first recorded Christian who bore this old pagan name was the great St. Brigit of Kildare; and through veneration for her, it has been perpetuated in Christian Ireland for 1400 years as a favourite name for women.

**Diancecht**, the mighty physician and god of Medicine, and his three brothers, **Goibniu**, or **Goibnenn**, the smith (whose wife is interred under the great mound beside Drogheda, now called the Millmount), **Credne** the *caird* or 'brazier,' and **Luchtinē** the *saer* or "carpenter," will be found noticed elsewhere in this book.

**Buanann** and **Ana**, two beneficent Dedannan goddesses, are mentioned in Cormac's Glossary as resembling each other: *i.e.* in their functions. *Buan-ann* means 'good mother': so called because she was the *ann*, or 'mother,' of the heroes, reared them, and taught them feats of arms.\* *Ana*, also called *Danu* or *Danann*, gave name to the *Tuatha Dea Danann* ('tribes of the goddess Danu'). She was the mother of the gods of the Irish,† that is to say, of the "three gods of Danu" (*Tri deo Danonn*), Brian, Iucharba, and Iuchar—whose father was Bres Mac Elathan, and who were killed by Lugh in Mana:‡ and she suckled and nursed these three so well that her name "Ana" came to signify 'plenty' (*ana*, 'wealth, treasure,' Mart. of O'Gorman). The *Cóir Anmann* (p. 289) adds that she was worshipped in Munster as the goddess of plenty: and the name and nutritive function of this goddess are prominently commemorated in *Da Chich Danainne*, 'the Two Paps of Danann,' a name given to two beautiful adjacent conical mountains near Killarney, which to this day are well known by the name of "The Paps."§

But there were other fairy chiefs besides those of the Dedannans: and some renowned *shees* belonged to Milesian princes, who became deified in imitation of their

\* Corm. Gloss., 17.

† *Ibid.*, 4.

‡ LL, p. 11, *b*, 3; and p. 30, *d*, last par.

§ Corm. Gloss., 4.



fairy predecessors. For instance, the Shee of **Aed-Ruad** [Ai-Roo] at Ballyshannon, in Donegal. Our ancient books relate that this *Aed-Ruad*, or Red Hugh, a Milesian chief, the father of Macha, founder of Emain, was drowned in the cataract at Ballyshannon, which was thence called after him *Eas-Acda-Ruaid* [Ass-ai-roo], 'Aed-Ruad's Waterfall,' now shortened to 'Assaroe.' He was buried over the cataract, in the mound which was called from him *Sid-Acda*—a name partly preserved in Mullaghshee, often called Mullinashee, both names meaning 'the hill of the *síd* or fairy-palace.'

This hill has recently been found to contain subterranean chambers, which confirms our ancient legendary accounts, and shows that it is a great sepulchral mound like those on the Boyne. How few of the people of Ballyshannon know that the familiar name Mullaghshee is a living memorial of those dim ages when Aed Ruad held sway, and that the great king himself has slept here in his dome-roofed dwelling for two thousand years!

Another Milesian chief, **Donn**, son of Milesius, was drowned in the magic storm raised by the spells of the Dedannans when the eight brothers came to invade Ireland.\* But for him it was only changing an earthly mode of existence for a much pleasanter one in his airy palace on the top of Knockfierna, as the renowned king of the fairies: and here he ruled over all the great Limerick plain around the mountain, where many legends of him still linger among the peasantry.

A male fairy was a *fer-side* (*fer*, 'a man'): a female fairy, a *ben-side* or *banshee*, i.e. 'a woman from the fairy-hills.' Several fairy-hills were ruled by banshees as fairy queens. The banshee who presided as queen of the palace on the summit of Knockainy hill, in county Limerick, was **Aine** [Auně (2-syll.)], daughter of the Dedannan chief Eogabail, who gave her name to the hill, and to the

\* For which see Joyce, *Short Hist. of Ire.*, 127.

existing village of Knockainy. This was the fairy lady who, in a personal struggle with Olioll, or Aillil, king of Munster in the second century, cut his ear clean off, whence he was, and is, known as Ailill *Olom*, i.e. 'Ailill Bare-ear' (*o*, 'an ear'; *lom*, 'bare': see vol II. p. 102).\*

Two other banshees, still more renowned, were **Clidna** [Cleena] of Carrigcleena, and **Aebinn** or **Aibell** of Craglea. Cleena is the potent banshee that rules as queen over the fairies of South Munster. In the *Dinnsenchus* there is an ancient and pathetic story about her, wherein it is related that she was a foreigner from Fairy-land, who, coming to Ireland, was drowned while sleeping on the strand at the harbour of Glandore in South Cork, in the absence of her husband. In this harbour the sea, at certain times, utters a very peculiar, deep, hollow, and melancholy roar, among the caverns of the cliffs, which was formerly believed to foretell the death of a king of the south of Ireland, and which Dean Swift has described in his Latin poem "*Carberiæ Rupes*": Carbery being the name of the district.† This surge has been from time immemorial called *Tonn-Cleena*, 'Cleena's wave.' Cleena lived on, however, as a fairy. She had her palace in the heart of a pile of rocks, five miles from Mallow, which is still well known by the name of Carrig-Cleena: and numerous legends about her are still told among the Munster peasantry. Aebinn or Aibell [Eevin, Eevil], whose name signifies 'beautiful,' presided over North Munster, and was in an especial manner the guardian spirit of the Dalcassians or O'Briens. She had her palace two miles north of Killaloe, in a rock called Crageevil, but known by the name of Craglea, 'grey rock.' The rock is situated in a silent glen, under the face of a mountain; and the people affirm that she forsook her retreat when the woods which once covered the place were cut down.

\* See *Voyage of Bran*, II. 218, 219.

† See *Kilk. Arch. Journ.*, 1856, p. 127.

There is a spring in the face of the mountain, still called Tobereevil, 'Aibell's well.' The part she played in the Battle of Clontarf is briefly referred to at p. 246, *supra*; but it is related in full in my Short History of Ireland, pp. 219, and 223-4.

The old fort under which the banshee **Grian** of the Bright Cheeks had her dwelling still remains on the top of Pallas Grean hill in the county Limerick.\* One of the most noted of the fairy-palaces is on the top of Slievenamon in Tipperary. But to enumerate all the fairy-hills of Ireland, and relate fully the history of their presiding gods and goddesses, and the superstitious beliefs among the people regarding them, would occupy a good-sized volume.

In modern times the word 'banshee' has become narrowed in its meaning, and signifies a female spirit that attends certain families, and is heard *keening* or crying at night round the house when some member is about to die.† At the present day almost all raths, cashels, and mounds—the dwellings, forts, and sepulchres of the Firbolgs and Milesians, as well as those of the Dedannans—are considered as fairy haunts.

**Shees, open at Samain.**—On Samain Eve, the night before the 1st of November, or, as it is now called, All Hallows Night, or Hallowe'en, all the fairy hills were thrown wide open; for the *Fe-fiada* was taken off:—"The *shees* of Erin were always open at Samain," says the ancient tale of "The Boyish Exploits of Finn"; "for on [the eve of] that day it was impossible to keep them in [concealment]"; and we read in the story of "Echtra Nerai":—"They [the fairy host] will come on Samain next; for the *shees* of Erin are always open at Samain."‡ While

\* An account of her will be found in Joyce's Irish Names of Places, II. 242.

† For the Banshee, see Kilk. Arch. Journ., 1856, pp. 122 *et seq.*: and Crofton Croker's Fairy Legends.

‡ Rev. Celt., x. 225.

the *shees* remained open that night, any mortals who were bold enough to venture near might get a peep into them : —“ On one Samain Night [*i.e.* Samain Eve] Finn was “ near two *shees* : and he saw both of them open, after the “ *Fe-fiada* had been taken off them : and he saw a great “ fire in each of the *duns*, and heard persons talking in “ them.”\*

No sooner was the *Fe-fiada* lifted off, and the doors thrown open, than the inmates issued forth, and roamed where they pleased all over the country : so that, as we are told in the story of Echtra Nerai, people usually kept within doors, naturally enough afraid to go forth ; for “ demons would always appear on that night.”† From the cave of Cruachan or Croghan in Connaught, issued probably the most terrific of all those spectre hosts ; for immediately that darkness had closed in on Samain Eve, a crowd of horrible goblins rushed out, and among them a flock of copper-red birds, led by one monstrous three-headed vulture : and their poisonous breath withered up everything it touched : so that this cave came to be called the “ Hell-gate of Ireland.”‡ That same hell-gate cave is there still, but the demons are all gone—scared away, no doubt, by the voices of the Christian bells. The superstition that the fairies are abroad on Samain Night exists at the present day, both in Ireland and in Scotland.

Fairies—sometimes banshees or females, sometimes fershees or males—often kept company with mortals, and became greatly attached to them. Every Samain a banshee used to visit Fingin Mac Luchta, king of South Munster in the second century, and bring him on a round of visits to the *shees*, to see all the precious things therein.§ A banshee follower of a mortal was usually

\* Boyish Exploits, Rev. Celt., v. 202, par. 24.

† Kuno Meyer : Adventures of Nera, Rev. Celt., x. 215.

‡ Rev. Celt., xiii., 449 : Silva Gad., 353.

§ Stokes, Lives of SS., xxx.



called a *lennan-shee* ('fairy-lover'), and instances of such attachments are innumerable. Fiachna, king of Ulster, had a familiar *fer-side*, or 'fairy-man,' who used to tell him future events.\*

**Anann** or **Ana** (not the beneficent Ana, p. 261), **Bodb** or **Badb** [Bove, Bauv], and **Macha**, three weird sisters,† were war-goddesses or battle-furies—all malignant beings. They delighted in battle and slaughter. In an ancient Glossary quoted by Stokes,‡ Macha's mast-food is said to be the heads of men slain in battle. The old accounts of them are somewhat confused; but it appears that the terms *Mórrigan* and *Badb* were applied to all. *Mórrigan* (or *Mórrigu*, as it is often written), means 'great queen.' from *mór*, 'great,' and *rigan* [reean], 'a queen': but *Badb* is the name generally applied to a war-fury. The *Badb* often showed herself in battle in the form of a *fen-nóg*, i.e. a scallcrow, or royston crow, or carrion crow, fluttering over the heads of the combatants. The word, which is now pronounced *bibe*, is still in use as applied to the bird: and sometimes it is used as a reproachful name for a scolding woman—a good illustration of the commemoration of ancient beliefs in modern everyday speech. This bird is regarded by the peasantry all through Ireland—and to some extent in Scotland and Wales—with feelings of dread and dislike, a dim, popular memory of the terrible part it played in the battles of the olden time.

The *Badb* or *Mórrigan*, sometimes as a bird, and sometimes as a loathsome-looking hag, figures in all the ancient battles, down even to the Battle of Clontarf (A.D. 1014). In the midst of the din and horror she was often seen busily flitting about through the battle-cloud overhead: and sometimes she appeared before battle in anticipation of slaughter.§ Aed, king of Oriell in the sixth century, had a shield called *dub-gilla* ('black-fellow'):

\* Silva Gad., 428: Irish, 393, bottom.

† Rev. Celt., xii. 128.

‡ Three Irish Glossaries, xxxv.

§ Three Fragm., 191, last line.

"It was the feeder of ravens, and the *Badb* perched on its rim [during battle] and shrieked."\* Just before the Battle of Moyrath (A.D. 637), the grey-haired *Mórrigan*, in the form of a lean, nimble hag, was seen hovering and hopping about on the points of the spears and shields of the royal army who were victorious in the great battle that followed.† In the account of the slaughter of the nobles by the Plebeian races in the second century A.D., given in the Book of Fermoy, we read that, after the massacre, "gory *Badb* was joyful and women were sorrowful for that event."‡ Just before the Destruction of Bruiden Da Choca, the *Badb* showed herself as "a big-mouthed, swarthy, swift, sooty woman, lame, and squinting with her left eye."§

The *Bodb* was a war-goddess among the ancient Gaulish nations of the Continent, from whom, of course, as in many other cases, her legend was brought to Ireland by the Celtic emigrants. Some years ago a small pillar-stone, about thirty inches high, was found in France, with an interesting votive inscription to this goddess under the name of *Cathubodvae* (of which only *athubodvae* now remains, the *C* having disappeared with a corner of the stone that was broken off), compounded of *Cathu*, Irish, *cath*, 'battle,'



FIG. 75.

The *Cathubodvae* stone: first figured in *Revue Savoisienne*, Nov. 1867 (soon after its discovery): reprinted, by M. Adolphe Pictet, in the *Revue Archéologique* for July, 1868, with an elaborate essay by him. Figured again in Hennessy's article in *Revue Celtique*, vol. 1, p. 32, from which it has been copied here.

\* Tromdamh, in *Oss. Soc. Trans.*, v., pp. 16, 17, verse. But the editor mistranslates the expression.

† Moyrath, 199.

‡ Hennessy, "War Goddess," in *Rev. Celt.*, 1. 39.

§ Stokes, in *Rev. Celt.*, xxi. 315. For more examples see O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, 1. 301: and Moyrath, 231. See also De Jubainville, *La Civil. des Celtes*, 197, 198, 212.

and *Bodvae*, the Irish *Bodhb*. Though this goddess figures in the ancient literature of the Celtic nations in general, including the Welsh, there are fuller and more frequent accounts of her in Irish writings than in all the others put together.

"*Neit*," says Cormac's Glossary (p. 122), "was the god of battle with the pagans of the Gael: *Nemon* was his wife." In another part of the Glossary it is stated that *Nemon* was otherwise called *Be-Neit*, and that she was a *Badb*; and in O'Clery's Glossary she is called "*Badb* of battle, or a *fennóg*": but as being *Neit*'s wife she was probably the chief *Badb* or war-goddess of all. *Neit* and *Nemon* were malignant beings:—"Both are bad": "a venomous couple, truly, were they," says Cormac; and "hence is said [as a maledictive wish among the Irish] *Be-Neit* [attend] on thee!"\*

The *Badbs* were not the only war-goblins. There was a class of phantoms that sometimes appeared before battles, bent on mischief. Just before the Battle of Moylena (2nd cent.), three repulsive-looking witch-hags with blue beards appeared before the armies, hoarsely shrieking victory for Conn the Hundred Fighter, and defeat and death for the rival King Eoghan.† We read of malignant beings of this kind in connexion with Christianity also. At the Battle of Mucrime (A.D. 250) the air over the heads of the combatants was black with demons waiting to snap up and carry off the souls of sinners: while only two angels attended to bear away in the other direction the few souls they could claim.‡ Just before the Banquet of *Dun-nan-ged* (Moyrath, 23), two horrible black spectral beings, a man and a woman, both belonging to hell, came to the assembly, and having devoured an enormous quantity of food, cursed the banquet, after which they rushed out and vanished. But they left their baleful trail: for at that feast there

\* Corm. Gloss., 25, 26.

† Moylena, 119, 121.

‡ Silva Gad., 356: see also Ventry. 85, note 734.

arose a deadly quarrel which led to the Battle of Moyrath (A.D. 637).

Even so late as the fourteenth century, some of the historical tales record apparitions of this kind: but this may possibly be nothing more than an imitation of the older tales. In Mac Craith's account of the Wars of Thomond we read that when the Clan Brian Roe were marching to their destruction at the impending Battle of Doolin in Clare (A.D. 1317), they saw in the middle of a ford a hideous-looking gigantic hag

" With grey dishevelled hair  
Blood-draggled, and with sharp-boned arms, and fingers crook'd  
and spare,  
Dabbling and washing in the ford, where mid-leg deep she stood  
Beside a heap of heads and limbs that swam in oozing blood."

And when they asked who she was, she told them in a loud, croaking voice that she was the Washer of the Ford, and that the bloody human remains she was washing were their own heads and limbs which should be lopped off and mangled in the coming battle: on which she vanished before the terrified eyes of the soldiers.\*

In many remote, lonely glens there dwelt certain fierce apparitions—females—called *Geniti-glinni*, 'genii or sprites of the valley' (sing. *genit*: pl. *geniti*),† and others called *Bocanachs* (male goblins), and *Bananachs* (females): often in company with *Demna aeir* or demons of the air. At any terrible battle-crisis, many or all of these, with the other war-furies described above, were heard shrieking and howling with delight, some in the midst of the carnage, some far off in their lonely haunts. Just before one of Cuculainn's fierce onslaughts, the "*Bocanachs* and the "*Bananachs*, and the *Geniti-glinni*, and the demons of the "air, responded to his shout of defiance: and the *nemon*,

\* Sir Samuel Ferguson's *Congal*, pp. 57, 206: quoting from the Wars of Thomond.

† Moylena, 121, note c.

The Ferguson at p. 278 is another Ferguson: different from Sir Samuel. He was an Englishman.



" i.e. the *badb*, confounded the army [of Maive, Cuculainn's enemy], so that the men dashed themselves against the points of each other's spears and weapons, and one hundred warriors dropped dead with terror."\*

In the story of the Feast of Bricriu (p. 85), we are told how the three great Red Branch Champions, Laegaire the Victorious, Conall Cernach, and Cuculainn, contended one time for the *Curathmir*, or 'champion's bit' (vol. II. p. 109, *intra*), which was always awarded to the bravest and mightiest hero; and in order to determine this matter, they were subjected to various severe tests. On one of these occasions the stern-minded old chief, Samera, who acted as judge for the occasion, decided that the three heroes separately should attack a colony of *Geniti-glinni* that had their abode in a neighbouring valley. Laegaire went first; but they instantly fell on him with such demoniac ferocity that he was glad to escape, half-naked, leaving them his arms and battle-dress. Conall Cernach went next, and he, too, had soon to run for it; but he fared somewhat better, for, though leaving his spear, he bore away his sword. Lastly, Cuculainn: and they filled his ears with their hoarse shrieks, and falling on him tooth and nail, they broke his shield and spear, and tore his clothes to tatters. At last he could bear it no longer, and showed plain signs of running away. His faithful charioteer, Loeg, was looking on. Now, one of Loeg's duties was, whenever he saw his master about yielding in a fight, to shower reproaches on him, so as to enrage him the more. On this occasion he reviled him so vehemently and bitterly for his weakness, and poured out such contemptuous nicknames on him, that the hero became infuriated; and, turning on the goblins once more, sword in hand, he crushed and hacked them to pieces, so that the valley ran all red with their blood.

\* Hennessy, in *Rev. Celt.*, I. 43: see also Wars of GG, 174, 175: and Ventry, XI.

The class of fairies called *siabra* [sheevra,] who were also Dedannans—a sort of disreputable poor relations of Manannan and the Dagda—were powerful, demoniac, and dangerous elves. They are mentioned in our earliest literature. In the eighth or tenth century story of the “*Siabar-Chariot* (i.e. ‘*sheevra* or demon chariot’) of Cuculainn,” in the Book of the Dun Cow, St. Patrick tells King Laegaire that the apparition he sees is not a *siabrae*, but Cuculainn himself. To this day the name is quite familiar among the people, even those who speak only English: and they often call a crabbed little boy—small for his age—a “little sheevra”: exactly as Concobar Mac Nessa, nineteen centuries ago, when he was displeased with the boy Cuculainn, calls him a *sirite siabairthi*, a “little imp of a *sheevra*.”\* The sheevras were often incited by druids and others to do mischief to mortals. In revenge for King Cormac Mac Art’s leaning towards Christianity, the druids let loose sheevras against him, who choked him with the bone of a salmon, while he was eating his dinner: and certain persons, being jealous of a beautiful girl named *Aige*, set sheevras on her, who transformed her into a fawn.†

The *Leprechán*, as we now have him, is a little fellow whose occupation is making shoes for the fairies;‡ and on moonlight nights you may sometimes hear the tap-tap of his little hammer from where he sits, working in some lonely nook among bushes. If you can catch him, and keep your gaze fixed on him, he will tell you, after some threatening, where to find a *crook* of gold: but if you take your eyes off him for an instant, he is gone. The Leprechauns are an ancient race in Ireland, for we find them mentioned in some of our oldest tales. The original name was *Luchorpán*, from *lu*, ‘little,’ and *corpán*, a

\* LL, 64, b, last line: Miss Hull, Cuch. Saga, 143, where the English word “brat” does not well carry the sense of the original.

† Dinnsenchus of Fafaind, Rev. Celt., xv. 307.

‡ See Silva Gad., 199, 270.

diminutive of *corp*, a 'body' (Lat. *corpus* : 'a wee little body.' A passage in the Book of the Dun Cow—inserted, of course by the Christian redactor—informs us that they were descended from Ham, the son of Noah :—"It is from "him [Ham] descend *Luchrupans*, and Fomorian, and "goat-heads, and every other ill-shaped sort of men."\* They could do mischief to mortals, such as withering the corn, setting fire to houses, snipping the hair of women's heads clean off, and so forth ;† but were not prone to inflict evil except under provocation. From the beginning, as their name implies, they were of diminutive size ; for example, as they are presented to us in the ancient tale of the Death of Fergus Mac Leide, their stature might be about six inches. In the same tale the king of the Leprechauns was taken captive by Fergus, and ransomed himself by giving him a pair of magic shoes, which enabled him to go under the water whenever, and for as long as, he pleased :‡ just as at the present day a leprechaun, when you catch him—which is the difficulty—will give you heaps of money for letting him go. No doubt, the episode of the ransom by the magic shoes in the old story is the original version of the present superstition that the leprechaun is the fairies' shoemaker. The leprechauns of this particular story live in a beautiful country under Loch Rury, now Dundrum Bay, off the coast of county Down.

In modern times the *Pooka* has come to the front as a leading Irish goblin : but I fear he is not native Irish, as I do not find him mentioned in any ancient Irish documents. He appears to have been an immigrant fairy, brought hither by the Danish settlers : for we find in the old Norse language the word *púki*, meaning an 'imp,' which is, no doubt, the origin of our *púca* or pooka, and,

\* Kilck. Arch. Journ., 1872-3, p. 182 : LU, p. 2, a, bottom.

† Silva Gad., 279, 280.

‡ Silva Gad., 282, 283 : Br. Laws, I. 71, 73.

of the English Puck.\* But, like the Anglo-Norman settlers, he had not long lived in this country till he became "more Irish than the Irish themselves." For an account of his shape, character, and exploits, I must refer the reader to Crofton Croker's "Fairy Legends," and to the first volume of my "Origin and History of Irish Names of Places" (p. 188).

When the Milesians landed in Ireland, they were encountered by mysterious sights and sounds wherever they went, through the subtle spells of the Dedannans. As they climbed over the mountains of Kerry, half-formed spectres flitted dimly before their eyes: for Banba, the queen of one of the three Dedannan princes who ruled the land, sent a swarm of *meisi* [misha], or 'phantoms,' which froze the blood of the invaders with terror: and the mountain range of Slieve Mish, near Tralee, still retains the name of those apparitions.† O'Clery's Glossary explains *meisi* as meaning "*sheevra*, or phantom forms, "such as might be [spectral] bodies that rise from the "ground." The Dedannans could also command the services of whole clouds of *urtrochta* ('malignant sprites'), and *guidemain*, which last name, according to Cormac's Glossary (p. 87), was applied to spectres and fairy queens.

The early biographers of the Irish saints fully believed that in the pagan times Ireland was infested by numberless demons and evil spirits, just as they believed in the necromantic powers of the druids: which we can hardly wonder at, seeing that the belief in witches and witchcraft was universal all over Europe down to a late period. Of those evil beings, and of the early Christian notions regarding them, Jocelin, a monk of Furness in Lancashire, who wrote a Life of St. Patrick in the twelfth century, gives a very vivid and highly-coloured picture. He tells us that before the time of St. Patrick Ireland was troubled

\* Kuno Meyer, in *Rev. Celt.*, xii. 461.

† *Corm. Gloss.*, 119, 120.



with a three-fold plague of reptiles, demons, and magicians. As for reptiles—

“These venomous and monstrous creatures used to rise out of the earth and sea, and so prevailed over the whole island, that they wounded both men and animals with their deadly stings, often slew them with their cruel bitings, nad not seldom rent and devoured their members.” “The demons used to show themselves unto their worshippers in visible forms: they often attacked the people, inflicting much hurt; and only ceased from their baleful doings when they were appeased by foul, heathenish prayers and offerings. After this they were seen flying in the air and walking on the earth, loathsome and horrible to behold, in such multitudes that it seemed as if the whole island were too small to give them standing and flying room. Whence Ireland was deemed the special home of demons. And lastly, the magicians, evil-doers, and soothsayers abounded beyond what history records of any other country on the face of the earth.”

What with Dedannan gods, with war-gods and goddesses, apparitions, demons, sprites of the valley, ordinary ghosts, spectres, and goblins, fairies of various kinds—sheevras, leprechauns, banshees, and so forth—there appears to have been quite as numerous a population belonging to the spiritual world as of human beings. In those old pagan days, Ireland was an eerie place to live in: and it was high time for St. Patrick to come.

### 5. *Worship of Idols.*

Idols were very generally worshipped. The earliest authentic document that mentions idols is St. Patrick's “Confession,” in which the great apostle himself speaks of some of the Scots (*i.e.* Irish) who, up to that time, “had worshipped only idols and abominations”:\* and elsewhere in the same document he speaks of the practice of idol-worship as a thing well known among the Irish. The Tripartite Life (p. 41) informs us that Tara was, in the

\* Trip. Life, 369, 20.

time of the saint, the chief abode of "idolatry and druidism" (*ídlacht ocus druidecht*). In the same work the destruction of many idols is mentioned as part of Patrick's life-work: and a story is told (at p. 225) of two maidens—Christian converts—who were persecuted, and finally drowned, by a tyrannical petty king, for refusing to worship idols.

There was a great idol called **Cromm Cruach**, covered all over with gold and silver, in *Magh Slecht* (the 'Plain of Prostrations'), near the present village of Ballymagauran in the County Cavan, surrounded by twelve lesser idols, covered with brass or bronze. In our most ancient books there are descriptions of this idol. *Cromm Cruach* is the name given to it (with some slight variations in different passages) in the Book of Leinster. It is called *Cenn Cruaich* in the Tripartite Life: Jocelin (chap. lvi.) calls it *Cean Croithi*: and in Colgan's Third Life of St. Patrick it is *Cennerbhe*, which, however, Todd thinks is likely an error of transcription. In a very old legend, found in the *Dinnsenchus* in the Book of Leinster, it is related that, many centuries before the Christian era, King Tigernmas and crowds of his people were destroyed in some mysterious way, as they were worshipping it on Samain eve—the eve of the 1st November.\* *Crom Cruach* is in this book (LL. 16, b, 30) called the chief idol of Ireland (*ríg-ídal h-Ereenn*, 'king idol of Erin'): and in the *Rennes Dinnsenchus* (p. 35) we are told that, "until Patrick's advent, he was the god of every folk that colonised Ireland." In the main facts regarding *Cromm Cruach*, the secular literature is corroborated by the Lives of St. Patrick. In the Tripartite Life (pp. 91 and 93) it is stated that this idol was adored by King Laegaire, and by many others; and that Patrick, setting out from Granard, went straight to Magh Slecht, and overthrew the whole thirteen.

\* See also FM, A.M. 3656.

In the same authority (p. 217) we read that a chief named Foilge Berraide had adopted *Cenn Cruaich* as his special god, and that he attempted to kill Patrick in revenge for destroying it. *Cromm Cruach* and its twelve attendant idols were pillar-stones, covered with gold and bronze : and the Dinnsenchus in the Book of Leinster,\* after speaking of them, remarks that from the time of Heremon to the coming of the good Patrick of Armagh, there was adoration of stones in Ireland. The remains of these thirteen idols were in Magh Slecht at the time of the compilation of the Tripartite Life (eighth to tenth century) : for it states (pp. 91. 93) :—" The mark of the staff [*i.e.* the " ' staff of Jesus,' St. Patrick's crosier] *still* remains on its " left side " : and it goes on to say that the other twelve were also to be seen, buried up to their heads in the earth, as Patrick had left them.

In the western parts of Connaught there was another remarkable idol called *Cromm Dubh* : and the first Sunday in August, as the anniversary of its destruction, is still called, in Munster and Connaught, *Domnach Cruimm Duibh* ' Cromm Dubh's Sunday.' O'Flaherty† identifies *Cromm Dubh* with *Cromm Cruach*. Todd asserts that *Domnach Cruimm Duibh* was the Sunday next before *Samain*, or the 1st November.‡ But this cannot be ; for to this day the first Sunday in August is, in Clare, and in Munster generally, called *Domnach Cruimm Duibh*, and also " Garland Sunday," which the people, down to our own time, celebrated there as a sort of festival.§

As *Cromm Cruach* was the " king-idol " of all Ireland, there was a special idol-god, named *Kermend Kelstach*, that presided over Ulster. This stone-idol was still

\* LL, 214, v, first two lines : Hyde, Lit. Hist., 85 : Voyage of Bran. II. 365, verse 13.

† Ogyg., Part. III., chap. xxii. Probably O'Flaherty is wrong in this.

‡ Todd, St. Patrick, 128.

§ O'Curry, MS. Mat., 632 ; O'Looney, in Proc. R. I. Acad., 1870-76. p. 268. O'Curry and O'Looney were both natives of Clare.

preserved in the porch of the cathedral of Clogher down to the time of the annalist Cathal Maguire (died 1498), as he himself tells us.\*

**Pillar-stones** were worshipped in other parts of Ireland as well as at Moy-Slecht and Clogher. In the Brehon Laws (iv. 143) one of the objects used for marking the boundaries of land is stated to be "a stone of worship" (*lia adrada* [pron. lee-ira], from *lia*, a 'stone,' and *adrad* 'worship'). This interesting record at once connects the Irish custom with the Roman worship of the god Terminus, which god—as in Ireland—was merely a pillar-stone placed standing in the ground to mark the boundary of two adjacent properties. Even to this day some of these old idol or oracle-stones are known; and the memory of the rites performed at them is preserved in popular legend. Two miles from Stradbally in Waterford, just beside a bridge over a little stream falling into the river Tay, is a remarkable rock, still called *Clogh-lowrish* (Ir. *cloch-labhrais*, the 'speaking-stone'), which has given its name to the bridge. There is a very vivid tradition in the County Waterford, and indeed all over Munster—I heard it in Limerick—that in pagan times it gave responses, and decided causes. But on one occasion a wicked woman perjured herself in its presence, appealing to it to witness her truthfulness when she was really lying, whereupon it split in two, and never spoke again.† There were speaking-stones in other parts of Ireland: and one of them has given name to the present townland of Clolourish, near Enniscorthy, in Wexford.

The Welsh, too, had their speaking-stone, and called it by the same Celtic name, only using *lec*, or *lech*, a 'stone,' instead of *cloch*. This is mentioned by Giraldus Cambrensis, who calls it by its Welsh name *Lech-lawar*, correctly rendered by him the 'speaking-stone.' In his

\* Todd, St. Patrick, 129: Ogyg., III. xxii.

† See Tribes of Ireland, p. 17, note 1.



time it formed a bridge across a small stream: and he relates a legend how it once spoke, and also how, on a certain occasion, it cracked in the middle, like our *Clogh-lowrish*—"which crack"—he says—"is still to be seen."\* The word *lech* (Irish, *lec*) is used here, as it is the proper word, both in Irish and Welsh, for a flat flagstone. The fact that the speaking-stone superstition is common to both Irish and Welsh, shows that they must have had it from a period before the separation of these two Celtic branches, centuries before the Christian era.

Stones that uttered musical and other sounds are sometimes mentioned in Irish tales.† The most remarkable of these was the Lia Fail, or inauguration stone, at Tara, which *roared* when a king of the true Scotie or Milesian race stood on it: like the Egyptian Vocal Memnon, which uttered musical sounds when it received the rays of the rising sun. We are not told that any of these Irish vocal stones were worshipped: but they were probably connected—by a sort of distant cousinship—with the acknowledged stone idols. Stones, as well as fountains and trees, were worshipped on the Continent, as well as in Britain, even so late as the tenth or eleventh century: and the three are often mentioned in the ecclesiastical canons as objects of worship.‡ In Ireland, as we see in this section and section 8, stones and wells were worshipped: but though certain kinds of trees were in some degree venerated, I cannot find that any trees were actually worshipped.

The Irish had an idol, called in Cormac's Glossary (p. 23) **Bial**, and named **Bél** in an ancient manuscript quoted by Petrie in his Tara (p. 84), which also states that, on a certain festival day, "two of the young of every kind of cattle were exhibited as in the possession of Bél"

\* Hib. Expugn., i. xxxvii.

† See Voyage of Bran, i., p. 10, verse 17; and note 17 at p. 39.

‡ Fergusson, Rude Stone Monuments. 24, 25.

(*i.e.* presented or offered to him). Stokes (Corm. Gl., 23) quotes a statement from another ancient manuscript, that "a fire was always kindled in Píel's or Bial's name at the beginning of summer (*i.e.* on May Day), and cattle were driven between the two fires." Keating also (p. 300), who had authority for all his statements, tells us that during the yearly May meeting at Ushnagh, they offered sacrifice to the chief god whom they adored, whose name was Bél, and repeats the statement about offering the young of the cattle. A similar statement is made in another ancient authority :\* but here the offering is made at a different season : we are informed that at *Bron-Trogin*, *i.e.* the beginning of autumn, the young of every kind of animal used to be "assigned to the possession of the idol Bél." In none of these cases does there appear to have been a sacrifice : it was a mere nominal offer. Down to two hundred years ago the memory of this Irish god was preserved in the western islands of Scotland ; for Martin (p. 105) tells us that the people there had a god whom they called Bel.

So much nonsense has been written about the connexion of the Phœnicians with Ireland that one almost hesitates to touch on the subject at all. Yet when we bear in mind the well-known historical facts that the Phœnicians introduced the worship of their sun-god Baal into the neighbouring countries, and into all their colonies, including Spain, with which last-named country Ireland had early close communication : that the Phœnicians themselves were well acquainted with Ireland : that this worship was widely spread, each country having its own god Baal or Bel : that the Irish *Bél* [pron. Bail], or *Bíel*, or *Bial*, was worshipped with fire ceremonies, as we know Baal himself was : and, lastly, the identity of the Phœnician and Irish names for their respective gods : it seems impossible to resist the belief that the name and

\* The Wooing of Emer, in *Rev. Celt.*, xi. 443.

worship of the Irish B  l was derived—directly or indirectly—from the Ph  nicians.

One of the Irish words for an idol was *idal*, which, of course, was borrowed into the Irish language from Greek through Latin. But there are native terms also. *Arracht* is a shape, a likeness, a spectre, an idol: when St. Patrick went to Cashel, all the *arrachts* in King Aengus's palace fell on their faces, like Dagon before the Ark.\* A more common word is *l  m-dia*, 'hand-god,' a small portable idol, a household god, like the *teraphim* of the Hebrews, and the *penates* of the Romans. When Rachel departed from her father's house, as the *Saltair na Rann* (line 3016) tells the story, she brought away with her her father's *l  m-deo*, which is the Irish rendering of the *teraphim*. In like manner, in the Irish version of a portion of the *  neid*, in the Book of Ballymote, we are told that when   neas was about to fly from Troy, he said:—"Let Anchises take the *l  im-deo* (*penates*, 'household gods') with him."† Just as the Deluge was about to come on, Bith and his daughter Ceasar asked Noah for a place in the Ark: and being refused, they consulted a *l  imh-dhia*, who advised them to make a ship for themselves and go to sea, which they did, and set sail for Ireland.‡ It was, no doubt, hand-gods of this kind that the poet brought into his bed when he was about to go to sleep for revelations under the influence of Imbas Forosnai (p. 243, *supra*). Such handy little gods, corresponding with the Roman *penates* and *lares*, are probably the household gods referred to under the name *Tromdhe* in the following short article, quoted in a note by O'Donovan in Cormac's Glossary (p. 163), from some old Irish Glossary:—" *Tromdhe*, i.e. tutelary gods, i.e. floor-gods, or gods of protection."

\* Trip. Life, 194, 23; 258, 9.

† Zeitschr. f  r Celt. Phil., II. 448.

‡ Joyce, Keating. p. 4c.

### 6. *Human Sacrifice.*

In connexion with idol-worship it will be convenient to examine the question whether human beings were sacrificed in ancient Ireland. There is only a single document in old Irish literature stating that human sacrifice was practised as part of a religious rite, namely, the *Dinnsenchus*. In this it is mentioned twice; once in the account of *Tailltenn*; the other in that of *Magh Slecht*. The first, as we know, was penned by a Christian scribe for it mentions the preaching of St. Patrick; and the other was obviously produced by the same hand, or under the same influence. Indeed, throughout the whole of the *Dinnsenchus* there are many Christian allusions and remarks indicating that the writer was a monk. In accounting for the name of *Tailltenn* (now *Teltown*, in *Meath*), he takes occasion to state that St. Patrick, when addressing the multitudes at the great fair there, "preached "against [the slaying of] yoke oxen and the slaying of "milch cows, and [against] the burning of the first-born "progeny."\* In the second passage, in giving the origin of the name of *Magh Slecht* ('Plain of Prostrations'), where the idol *Cromm Cruach* stood, the writer tells us that the worshippers sacrificed their children to this idol in order to obtain plenty of corn, honey, and milk. The account of the idol, and of the destruction of King *Tigernmas* and his people while worshipping it, is given in the form of a short poem, of which a shorter prose version is found in other copies of the *Dinnsenchus*. The following is the translation, by Professor Kuno Meyer,† of that part of the poem that concerns us:—

'To him [*Cromm Cruach*] without glory they would kill their  
wretched offspring with much wailing and peril, to pour their

\* Sullivan, *Introd.*, 641: LL, 201, *a*, 15.

† In the *Voyage of Bran*, II. 304. The original Irish poem is in LL, 213, *b*: and a transcript, in Roman type, will be found in the *Voyage of Bran*, II. 301.



blood around Cromm Cruach. Milk and honey they would ask from him speedily, in return for one-third of their healthy issue. Great was the horror and the scare of him. To him noble Gaels would prostrate themselves. From the worship of him with many manslaughters, the plain is called Magh Slecht."

The abridged prose version in the Rennes copy of the *Dinnsenchus* merely varies the expression:—"To him [Cromm Cruach] they used to offer the firstlings of every "issue, and the chief scions of every clan."\*

These two passages are the only direct statements known to me in all our old native literature that the ancient Irish practised human sacrifice: and being in the same document, they amount to a single statement—so far as concerns the value of their testimony. Though Keating, O'Flaherty, the Four Masters, and other native writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who all wrote from old authorities, tell us about the worship of *Cromm Cruach* and the death of Tigernmas, they make no mention of human sacrifice: a plain indication that they did not consider the unsupported *Dinnsenchus* a sufficient authority on so important a point. Still more significant is the circumstance that in a preceding part of the same Book of Leinster (p. 16, *b*) there is a prose account of this idol, and of the death of Tigernmas with a multitude of his people while worshipping it, in which there is not a word about sacrificing human beings.

But there is still stronger evidence, though of a negative character. Scattered everywhere through our ancient literature, both secular and ecclesiastical—as this chapter shows—we find abundant descriptions and details of the rites and superstitions of the pagan Irish: and in no place—with this single exception—do we find a word or hint pointing to human sacrifice to pagan gods or idols. According to the accounts in the *Dinnsenchus*, the

worship and ritual of this idol, and the practice of sacrificing the first-born progeny, continued till the time of St. Patrick. But neither in the Confession of St. Patrick—written by himself—in which he mentions and inveighs against several of the worst pagan practices, nor in the seventh-century Life of him by Muirchu, nor in the annotations of Tirechan—also of the seventh century—nor in the Tripartite Life, nor in Colgan's Seventh Life—which two last narratives give details of the worship of Cromm Cruach—in none of these—all of them older than the Dinnsenchus (which is comparatively modern)—is there any mention of human sacrifice. Patrick, in his progress through the country, heard all about this famous idol, and turned his steps from Granard to Magh Slecht for the express purpose of destroying it. If human beings had been sacrificed, he would have known of it, and his biographers would have recorded it. The writers of the Lives of the Saint were very naturally on the look-out for occasions to glorify his memory. They were ready enough, as we see by many examples, to show up the evil practices of the pagan Irish, and to point out the change for the better after their conversion; and it seems wholly incredible that they should withhold from St. Patrick the credit of putting a stop to this, the greatest abomination of all, which—if the Dinnsenchus is telling truth—must have been notorious at that time, since—according to this authority—the saint himself preached against it at Tailltenn.

There is still another most important consideration affecting the credit of the record in question: that nearly all the stories of the Dinnsenchus accounting for names—of which this is one—are mere fables, invented to suit the several occasions. The Dinnsenchus is, from many points of view, a highly instructive and interesting document: but its importance fortunately does not depend on the credibility of the stories. As a typical example of these

etymological narratives, take the story accounting for the origin and name of the river Boyne. There was a sacred well at the foot of *Side Nechtain* (now Carbury Hill in County Kildare) on which none were to look save four privileged persons, on pain of some dreadful personal injury. But the lady *Boand* ridiculed the prohibition, and, going to the well, walked contemptuously thrice round it left-hand-wise (see p. 302, *infra*): whereupon the well burst up round her, and broke her thigh-bone, one hand, and one eye. She fled in terror eastward: but the water pursued her till she arrived at the seashore, where she was drowned. Even after that the water continued to flow so as to form the river Boand or Boyne, which took its name from her.\* It is in company of such stories as this—for nearly all the Dinnsenchus stories are of a similar kind—we find the account of the sacrifice of human beings to Cromm Cruach.

Giving due weight to all these considerations, we need have no hesitation in pronouncing this Dinnsenchus record an invention pure and simple: and I venture to express my belief that no human beings were ever sacrificed in Ireland to Cromm Cruach or to any other idol or to any pagan god. Where and by whom the story was originated, it is now impossible to tell: but it seems probable that the poem was inserted—as Dr. Hyde remarks (*Lit. Hist.*, 92)—“by a Christian chronicler familiar with the accounts of Moloch and Ashtaroth.” It is just such a statement as we might expect would be invented in order to add human sacrifice as a heightening touch to the abominations of Magh Slecht.

**Stability of Building secured by Blood.**—But it is not unlikely that at some very remote period, long before the time of St. Patrick, human beings were immolated in another way. There was an ancient superstition that when an important building was about to be erected, its

\* Rennes Dinn., *Rev. Celt.*, xv. 315.

safety and stability were ensured by sprinkling the foundations with the blood of some human victim, who was to be slain for the purpose. The memory of this archaic belief is preserved in the fanciful etymology of "Emain" (the name of the great Ulster palace) given in Cormac's Glossary (p. 63), from *em* or *ema*, 'blood,' and *ain* or *uin*, 'one,' "because"—says the Glossary—"the blood of one man was shed at the time of its erection." In a note on this passage Dr. Stokes, the editor, says:—"The superstition here referred to, as to the need of immolating a human being to ensure the stability of a building, is still current in India." It appears that a similar superstition existed among the Danes, Greeks, and Servians. Nennius has preserved the old British tradition that when Dinas Emris in Wales was founded by Gortigern, his druids told him that, in order that the structure should last for ever, it was necessary to sacrifice a child who had no father, and to sprinkle his blood on the foundation. Such a child was found—a little boy—who was gifted with preternatural wisdom, and who, when he was brought forth to be killed, argued the matter with the druids so successfully that the king let him off.\* This boy was subsequently the Welsh bard and prophet Merlin.

In some of the Irish Lives of St. Columkille there is a legend that after the settlement of the saint in Iona, one of his disciples, a Briton, named Odran, offered to die, so that his burial, with the usual Christian rites, might scare away the demons that infested the island. So he died and was buried, and the demons fled. According to later oral versions of this legend, Odran was sacrificed by his own consent, and buried under the foundations, to counteract the malign influences of evil spirits, who were breaking down Columkille's churches as fast as he erected

\* Nennius, §§ 40-42: Irish Nennius, 93. and Additional Notes, p. xxiv: Stokes, Three Irish Glossaries, xli., note: Stokes, Lives of SS., 309: Wood-Martin, Pagan Ireland, 212: and O'Curry, Man. & Cust. I. 222.



them. The tradition that persons were formerly buried alive—or first killed and then buried—under the foundations of newly erected buildings, to ensure their stability, is prevalent to-day all over the Hebrides, according to Mr. Carmichael, who gives several traditional instances.\* Although this evidence is all legendary, yet, seeing that the legend is so widely spread, it is to be feared that, in some prehistoric time, the horrible rite was really practised, in Ireland as elsewhere.

There is a trace—though purely legendary—of the immolation of human beings in Ireland, for a different purpose, in an ancient tale referred to by Dr. W. K. Sullivan (Intro., 333), “The Courtship of Becuma,” copied into the Book of Fermoy from some older book. Here a blight comes on the corn and milk all over the country on account of a great crime committed by a woman; on which the druids declared that in order to remove the blight it was necessary to slay the son of a couple characterised by certain marks and tokens, and to sprinkle the blood on the doorposts of Tara. The boy was found: but just as he was about to be killed, a wonderfully formed cow appeared, which was slain instead of him: and the doorposts were sprinkled with her blood, which removed the blight. This story, it will be observed, curiously corresponds with the Greek legend of Iphigenia: and in some respects with the narrative of the intended sacrifice of Isaac.

### 7. *Worship of Weapons.*

According to an ancient tradition given in the story of the second Battle of Moytura, some of the pagan Irish worshipped their weapons. This story relates that after the battle, Ogma the Dedannan, whose party had gained the victory, found on the field *Orna*, the sword of *Tethra*, a Fomorian king: and he unsheathed and cleaned it.

\* *Carmina Gadelica*, II. 316.

“ Then the sword ”—the story goes on to say—“ related whatsoever had been done by it : for it was the custom of swords at that time, when unsheathed, to set forth the deeds that had been done by them. Hence also charms are preserved in swords. Now the reason why demons used to speak from weapons at that time was, because weapons were then worshipped by human beings.”\* A remnant of this superstition survived to the sixteenth century :—“ The Irish at this day ”—says Spenser (View, 97)—“ when they go to battaile, say certain prayers or charms to their swords, making a crosse therewith upon the earth, and thrusting the points of their blades into the ground, thinking thereby to have the better successe in fight.”†

The veneration for arms, amounting sometimes to downright worship, accounts for the custom of swearing by them. This oath, which was very usual, was quite as binding as that by the elements. The reason is given in the Sick Bed of Cuculainn :‡—“ Because demons were accustomed to speak to them from their arms ; and hence it was that an oath by their arms was inviolable.” Once on a time Cormac Gaileng wanted some badgers for a feast : and going to a warren, where lived certain badgers with human reason, he called on them to come forth, promising that no evil should be done to them. But they, distrusting him, refused : whereupon he swore upon his own father’s spear, which he held in his hand, not to harm them. So they—believing that he would not dare to violate the spear—foolishly came forth : and Cormac fell on them instantly and killed them all. For this crime—violating the spear—his father banished him ; and this son was ever after called Cormac *Gaileng*, that is

\* Stokes in *Rev. Celt.*, xii. 107.

† For the reverence paid to swords by Continental nations in the middle ages, see Sir Frederick Pollok’s *Oxford Lectures*, p. 269.

‡ *Atlantis*, i. 371.

to say, "Of the dishonoured spear." We have a witness of his infamy to this day in the barony of Gallen in Mayo, which takes its name from him.\* The custom of swearing by weapons took long to die out—like the worship of them—for Spenser (View, 98) informs us that in his day the Irish commonly swore by their swords.

### 8. *Worship of the Elements.*

**Elemental Worship in General.**—In the Lives of the Saints and other ecclesiastical writings, as well as in the lay literature, we have ample evidence that various natural objects were worshipped by the ancient Irish. A very clear example of a direct appeal to the powers of nature occurs in the story of the Táin in the Book of the Dun Cow. Cuculainn—who was a demigod—fighting alone against Maive's forces, and finding himself hard pressed, invokes the heavens and the earth, the sea and the river Cronn, to help him: and his prayer was answered, for the river surged up and overwhelmed numbers of his enemies.† That there existed in the ninth and tenth centuries a vivid tradition of elemental worship is shown by the words of Cormac's Glossary quoted below (p. 290). But this worship was only partial, confined to individuals or to the people of certain districts, each individual, or family, or group, having some special favourite object. We have no record of the universal worship of any element. There is reason to believe that it was not the mere material object they worshipped, but a spirit or genius supposed to dwell in it: for the Celts of Ireland peopled almost all remarkable natural objects with preternatural beings.

**Wells.**—The worship of water, as represented in wells, is often mentioned. The Tripartite Life, and Tirechan, in the Book of Armagh, relate that St. Patrick, in his journey through Connaught, came to a well called *Slán* [slaun:

\* Joyce, *Irish Names of Places*, II. 244.

† Kilk. Archæol. Journ., 1868, p. 308.

*i.e.* 'healing'] which the heathens worshipped as a god ; believing that a certain 'prophet' (*fáith* in the Irish Tripartite : *profeta* in Tirechan's Latin) had caused himself to be buried under it in a stone coffin, to keep his bones cool from fire that he dreaded : for " he adored water as a god, but hated fire as an evil being."\* This prophet was of course a druid. More than a century later, in the time of St. Columba, as will be found mentioned farther on, there was a well in Scotland which the people " worshipped as a divinity." In the account of St. Patrick's contest with the druids at Tara, given in Muirchu's Life, and also in the Tripartite, we are told that the king's druid Lucet Mael declined Patrick's challenge to put the Christian and the pagan books in water to ascertain which would come out unharmed ; for, having heard of baptism, he declared that Patrick worshipped water as a god. And when the ordeal by fire was proposed, he also objected, on the ground that the saint worshipped water and fire alternately : all which shows that the worship of these two elements was quite familiar at the time. It is to be observed that well-worship was not peculiar to Ireland : at one time it prevailed all over Europe.

**The Sun.**—That the sun was worshipped in Ireland—at least partially, like some other natural objects—is made certain by several passages in our ancient literature. St. Patrick plainly intimates this when he says in his Confession—speaking of the Irish—that all who adore the sun shall perish eternally. This is a contemporary statement : for the saint is evidently denouncing a practice existing in his own time.† We have a more specific account in Cormac's Glossary (p. 54) ; but this entry is four centuries later, and records, not contemporary custom, but one existing long before the time of the compilation of the Glossary. It states that *Indelba* (' Images ') was the name applied to the altars of certain idols : and that these altars

\* Trip. Life, 123 and note 2 ; 323. † See also Ware, *Antiqq.*, II. 122.



were so called because "they [the pagans] were wont to "carve on them the forms (Irish, *delba*) of the elements "they adored: for example, the figure of the sun." As curiously corroborative of this, Keating (p. 462) has a legend, from some old authority not now known, that in the time of St. Columkille there was in Tirconnell a certain Christian priest (*sacart*)—but he must have been half a pagan—who had built a church, in which he placed an altar of glass with an image (*delb*) of the sun, and another of the moon, carved on it: for which—as the legend has it—he was being carried off by demons, but was rescued by St. Columkille. In another part of his work, Keating quotes an ancient poem which states that the three last Dedannan kings of Ireland derived their cognomens from the objects of their worship, one of whom was *Mac Gréine* ('son or devotee of the sun'), because his god was the sun (*grían*, gen. *gréine*).

**Fire.**—That fire was worshipped by some of the Irish appears from the statement in the Tripartite Life that Laegaire's druid accused St. Patrick of having fire for a god. We know that certain pagan festivals were celebrated in Ireland, in which fire played a prominent part. Thus in A.D. 433 a great fire was kindled at Tara, as part of some festival, and while it was burning no other should be kindled in the country all round, on pain of death.\* Cormac's Glossary (p. 19) tells us that fires were lighted by the druids on May Day, with great incantations, and that cattle used to be driven through or between them as a preservative against disease for the coming year. He says also that from this ceremony, Beltaine or May Day took its name, i.e., *bel-tene*, lucky fire.† A very ancient poem, printed by Kuno Meyer in "*Hibernia Minora*" (p. 49), enumerating the May Day celebrations, mentions among them a bonfire on a hill (*tendal ar cnuc*). Another authority

\* Hogan, *Docum.*, 33.

† See also D'Arbois de Jubainville, vi., pp. 244-246.

states that these fires were kindled in the name of the idol-god *Bél* (Cormac, p. 23). Keating (p. 300) tells us that it was at Ushnagh, during the great May Day meeting there, that this fire was lighted in honour of *Bél* : and he goes on to say that at this same time it was the custom to light two fires to *Bél* in every district in Ireland, and to drive the cattle between them to protect them from the diseases of the year. He states also that during the meeting held on Samain or 1st November at Tlachtga, a fire was kindled in which we are told that the druids burned sacrifices : and while it lasted, all other fires in Ireland were to be extinguished or covered.

These fire-ceremonies have descended to our time. From an interesting communication in the *Kilkenny Archæological Journal*, 1883-4, p. 64, we learn that, about the beginning of the last century, people used a fire ceremonial for the cure of diseased cattle. When the disease broke out in one of the farms, all the fires in the townland were at a given time put out ; and a number of men, having assembled at the farm, produced fire—called in Irish *teine-éigin*, i.e., ' forced fire '—by the friction of two dry pieces of wood, the men taking their turn at the work. With this they kindled a great smoky fire of *scraws* (grassy sods from the surface of a bog) mixed with soot, and held the cattle over the smoke. This they said stamped out the disease. Martin (p. 113) found a similar custom in the Scottish Western Isles in 1703 : but here water was boiled over the *tin-egin*, as he calls it, and sprinkled over the infected cattle. The custom of driving cattle through fires against disease on the eve of the 1st of May, and on the eve of the 24th June (St. John's Day), continued in Ireland, as well as in the Scottish Highlands, to a period within living memory.\* Many curious fire-customs are still, or were until very lately, prevalent in some parts of the country on May

\* *Cármichael*, *Carmina Gadelica*, II. 340, for Scotland. I saw it done in Ireland.

Day, and the evening before : and on the eve of the 24th June—St. John's Day—they light open air fires when dusk comes on, so that the whole country is illuminated. This custom is of great antiquity in Ireland ; for the *teine féile Eoin*, the ' fire of John's festival,' is mentioned in the Book of Hymns (a MS. of the ninth or tenth century) as well known at the time of the writer.\* The information given here regarding the worship of the elements has been drawn from authentic sources. But the detailed descriptions of sun and fire worship in Ireland, given by some writers of the last century, and their speculations about " bovine cultus," " porcine cultus," " Crom the god of fire or of the winds," and such like, as well as the pictures of divination by Irish druids from the blood of victims, are all the dreams of persons who never undertook the labour of investigating the matter by reference to the ancient authentic literature of the country.

**Elemental Oath.**—No doubt this ancient elemental worship was the origin of the very general pagan Irish custom of swearing by the elements, or, in other words, giving the elements as guarantee : an oath which it was very dangerous to violate, as is shown by the fate of Laegaire, king of Ireland in the time of St. Patrick. In an attempt to exact the Boruma tribute from Leinster, he was defeated and taken prisoner by the Leinstermen : but was released on taking the usual oath, giving as guarantee—*i.e.*, swearing by—the " sun and moon, water and air, day and night, sea and land," that he would never again demand it. But in open violation of his oath he invaded Leinster for this same Tribute in less than two years : whereupon " the elements passed a " doom of death on Laegaire, to wit, the earth to swallow " him up, the sun to burn him, and the wind to depart from " him," " so that "—as the Four Masters (A.D. 458) express

\* The custom of lighting fires on the 23rd June, St. John's Eve, was at one time general over Europe, and has been kept up in Paris. De Jubainville : *La Civil. des Celtes*, p. 243.

it—"the sun and wind killed him because he had violated them": "for"—says an older authority, the Book of the Dun Cow—"no one durst violate them at that time."\*

How long the worship of idols and of the elements remained in the country it is now impossible to say. But it is probable that the practices lurked in remote places far into Christian times. We need not be surprised at this when we know that—according to the testimony of the Venerable Bede (Eccl. Hist., III., xxx.)—idolatry was openly practised in England, even by some of the kings of the Heptarchy, in spite of the exertions of the clergy, in the latter part of the seventh century. And it has been already more than once remarked in this book, that traces of pagan worship have remained in Ireland to the present day.

### 9. *The Pagan Heaven, and a Future State.*

**Names and Situations.**—There was a belief in a land of everlasting youth and peace, beautiful beyond conception, always inhabited by fairies, and called by various names:—*Tír-nan-óg* [Teernanogue], *i.e.*, the 'Land of the [ever-] youthful people': *I-Bresail*, or *I-Brazil*, the 'Land of Bresal': *Tír-nam-beó* [Teer-nam-yo], the 'Land of the [ever-] living': *Mag Mell* [Moy-Mell], the 'Plain of pleasures' (for which *Ten-mhagh Trógaighi*, pron. Tenvah-trógee, was another name†): *Mag-Mon*, 'Plain of Sports': *Tír-Tairngiri*, the 'Land of Promise': and *Tír-na-Sorcha*, the 'Land of Light.' Sometimes it is described as situated far out in the Western Ocean: sometimes it was deep down under the sea or under a lake or well; sometimes it was in a hollow *shee* or fairy-hill. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that there were many such happy

\* See Rev. Celt., xiii. 53: Silva Gad., 407: Trip. Life, 567 LL, 299, b, last twelve lines; LU, 118, b, last eleven lines.

† Ir. Texte, I. 214, note 24.



lands, situated in those various places. The inhabitants were the *side* [shee] or fairies, who were immortal, and who lived in perfect peace and in a perpetual round of sensuous, but harmless and sinless pleasures.

In nearly all the old accounts of this happy land, the absence of wickedness is expressly mentioned. The man from Tir Tairngiri tells Cormac that it was "a land wherein there is nought save truth, and there is neither age, nor decay, nor gloom, nor sadness, nor envy, nor jealousy, nor hatred, nor haughtiness."\* The absence of sin, and such like characteristics, are of course additions by Christian scribes.

In ancient Irish romantic tales we find many descriptions of this pagan heaven, bearing a general resemblance to each other. One which pictures Mag Mon ('Plain of Sports') situated far out in the Western Ocean—the land that is called elsewhere Moy Mell, or I-Brazil—may be read, translated by Prof. Kuno Meyer, in Mr. Alfred Nutt's work, "The Voyage of Bran," I. 4. This composition, which is in poetry, is ascribed by scholars to the seventh century. The following poetical description of the Fairy King Midir's heavenly country, under the *shee* of Bri Leith, the hill now called Slieve Golry near Ardagh in the county Longford, will give the reader an excellent idea of these happy abodes: it has been translated by O'Curry from the Book of the Dun Cow:—

O Befind, wilt thou come with me,  
To a wonderful land that is mine,  
Where the hair is like the blossom of the golden *sobarche*,  
Where the tender body is as fair as snow.

There shall be neither grief nor care;  
White are the teeth, black the eyebrows,  
Pleasant to the eye the number of our host;  
On every cheek is the hue of the foxglove.

\* Ir. Texte, III. 212.

Crimson of the plain is each brake,  
 Delightful to the eye the blackbird's eggs ;  
 Though pleasant to behold are the plains of Inisfail [Ireland],  
 Rarely wouldst thou think of them after frequenting the  
 Great Plain.

Though intoxicating thou deemest the ales of Inisfail,  
 More intoxicating are the ales of the great land—  
 The wonderful land—the land I speak of,  
 Where youth never grows to old age.

Warm sweet streams traverse the land,  
 The choicest of mead and of wine ;  
 Handsome people without blemish,  
 Conception without sin, without stain.

We see everyone on every side,  
 And no one seeth us ;  
 The cloud of Adam's transgression  
 Has caused this concealment of us from them.

O lady, if thou comest to my valiant people,  
 A diadem of gold shall be on thy head ;  
 Flesh of swine, all fresh, banquets of new milk and ale,  
 Shalt thou have with me there, O Befind.\*

The name *Tír Tairngiri* is often found, not only in the Tales, but in the Christian legends of the saints. St. Brendan had been praying for some secure, delightful land, remote from the haunts of men. And an angel said to him :—" Arise, O Brendan, for God hath given to thee what thou hast sought—*Tír-Tairngire*."† After this the angel directs him how to find it : and it was in search of this promised happy land that Brendan went on his celebrated voyage out on the Western Ocean. The name *Tír-Tairngire* is a translation of the Scriptural name of the ' Land of Promise ' ; it is of great antiquity, for it is found in the eighth and ninth-century glosses of Zeuss ;

\* The original, with rigidly literal translation, may be seen in O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, II. p. 191 : and Dr. Douglas Hyde has given a metrical translation in his literary *History of Ireland*, p. 103. For the Irish Pagan Elysium, see Mr. Alfred Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, vol. I. : Hyde, *Lit. Hist.*, p. 94 : and for a short composite poetical description, Joyce, *Old Celtic Romances*, 110.

† Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, 252.

but the idea of the land itself is derived from the pagan legend of the happy fairyland.

This pagan heaven legend did not escape the notice of Giraldus Cambrensis. He tells the story of the Phantom Island, as he calls it, off the western coast, and how, on one occasion when it appeared, some men rowed out towards it, and shot a fiery arrow against it, which fixed it.\* To this day the legend remains as vivid as ever : and the people believe that if they could succeed in throwing fire on it from their boat, it would become fixed, as happened before the time of Giraldus.†

The happy land then was the abode of the spiritual and immortal fairy people ; but it was not for human beings, except a few individuals who were brought thither by the fairies, as will be told below.

**Immortality of the Soul.**—We know from Cæsar, Diodorus Siculus, and other classical writers, that the ancient Gauls or Celts taught, as one of their tenets, that the soul was immortal ; and that after death it passed from one human body to another : and this it appears, applied to all human beings. But in Irish literature I cannot find anything to warrant the conclusion that the pagan Irish believed that the souls of all men were immortal, or that the spirits of those who died were rewarded or punished in the other world for their conduct in this, or in fact that their spirits existed at all after death.‡ A few individuals became immortal in Fairyland, and some other few lived on after death, appearing as other men, or in the shapes of animals,

\* Top. Hib., II. xii.

† For the present ideas regarding the western phantom land, see Hardiman, *Ir. Minstr.*, I. 367, and Westropp, *Proc. R. I. Acad.*, 1912.

‡ This statement is, I believe, a correct inference from the evidence in those ancient native documents that have come down to us, and have been rendered available. But it is made with this reservation, that, in consequence of the wholesale destruction of our books, the full evidence may not be before us. In this connexion it is necessary to notice one Christian record, a remarkable expression of Tirechan's Annotations on the Life of St. Patrick, written in the seventh century. The pagan King

as will be presently related. But these are all palpable exceptions, and are put forward as such in the legends.\*

A few individuals were brought by fairies to the happy other world, and became immortal: and the time passed there so obscurely and pleasantly that a whole century appeared only the length of a year or so. Prince Connla, son of Conn the Hundred-Fighter (king of Ireland in the second century) was carried off in a crystal boat by a fairy maiden before the eyes of his father and friends, and was never seen on earth again.† Once a person got to Fairy-land he could never return, except, indeed, on a short visit, always in a boat or on horseback, merely to take a look at his native land: but if once he touched his mother earth, the spell of youth and immortality was broken, and he immediately felt the consequences. Bran, the son of Febal, had been sailing with his crew among the happy islands for hundreds of years, though they thought it was only the length of an ordinary voyage. When they returned to the coast of Kerry, one man jumped ashore, against solemn warning, but fell down instantly, and became a heap of ashes.‡ Ossian, the son of Finn, did not fare quite so badly when he returned to Ireland riding an enchanted steed, after his 300 years sojourn in Tirnanoge, which he thought only three years. Traversing

Laegaire, rejecting the teaching of St. Patrick, and expressing a determination to be buried, pagan fashion, standing up, armed, in his grave, is made to say to the saint:—"For the pagans are accustomed to be buried, armed, with their weapons ready, face to face to the day of *Erdathe* among the magi (druids), *i.e.*, the day of judgment of the Lord" (Petrie, Tara, 170). This would seem to imply that the druids had a day of judgment, called by them *Erdathe*, corresponding with the Christian day of judgment: which, again, would indirectly imply that they held the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. But this, besides being an isolated statement, has so decided a Christian complexion, that it would be unsafe to draw any conclusion from it.

\* See all this question (of Immortality and Metempsychosis) discussed in M. De Jubainville's *Cycle Mythologique*, chap. xv.

† Joyce, *Old Celtic Romances*, 106.

‡ Voyage of Bran, i. 32.



his old haunts, the wonder of all the strange people he met, for his size and beauty, he on one occasion, in trying to lift a great stone, overbalanced himself, and had to leap to the ground, when he instantly became a withered, bony, feeble old man, while his fairy steed galloped off and never returned.\* *Laegaire*, son of Crimthann, king of Connaught, went with fifty followers to Moy Mell to aid the fairy king Fiachna Mac Retach against a rival fairy king who had made war on him. Fiachna led them to the shore of a lake called Enloch, and all dived down, and soon came to Moy Mell. After defeating the enemy, *Laegaire* and his fifty men were permitted to visit their native place on horseback: but Fiachna warned then not to dismount. On their arrival their friends were overjoyed and besought them to stay: but *Laegaire* cried out:—"Do not approach or touch us: we have come only to bid you all farewell!" So saying they returned to the *shee*, where *Laegaire* now rules as fairy king jointly with Fiachna.†

In some tales, however, mortals who are detained in the *shee* are represented as thoroughly miserable. *Dian*, who had been a young noble on earth among the *Fena*, comes to see *Cailte* out of the fairy mound of Mullaghshee at Assaroe, beside Ballyshannon. *Cailte* asks how it fares with him: on which *Dian* replies that though of food and raiment there was abundance, yet he would rather be the lowest and most despised drudge among the servants of the *Fena*, than be the prince that he was in Fairyland. (*Silva Gad.*, 139 bottom.) This is almost exactly what the shade of the mighty hero Achilles says to Ulysses:—"Talk not to me of being a leader here in Hades: I had rather be on earth the servant of some poor landless man than bear sway as a prince here among the ghosts of the dead." (*Odyssey*, xi.) In modern

\* Joyce, *Old Celtic Romances*, 385.

† O'Grady, *Silva Gad.*, 290: 'LL Contents, 63, a, middle. See also Mr. Nutt, in the *Voyage of Bran*, vol. i., chap. iii. (pp. 144-160).

Irish fairy legends, those that have been carried off by fairies are always pining in misery in Fairyland.

**Metempsychosis.**—The foregoing observations regarding the pagan Irish notions of immortality after death apply in a great measure to their ideas of metempsychosis. In our romantic literature there are legends of the re-birth of human beings : *i.e.* certain persons, commonly heroes or demigods, were re-born, and figured in the world, with new personality, name, and character. Thus Cuculainn was a re-incarnation of the Dedannan hero-god, Lug of the Long Arms. In other cases human beings, after death, took the shapes of various animals in succession, and re-appeared as human beings. Mongan of Rathmore Moylinny, king of Dalriada, in Ulster, in the seventh century—a historical personage—was fabled to be a re-incarnation of the great Finn Mac Cumail of the third century.\* This same Mongan went, after death, into various shapes, a wolf, a stag, a salmon, a seal, a swan ; like the Welsh Taliessin. Fintan, the nephew of Parthalon, survived the deluge, and lived in the shapes of various animals successively for many ages, after which he was re-incarnated in the sixth century as a man named Tuan Mac Cairill.† This Tuan was a celebrated sage, and no wonder, for he witnessed all the remarkable things that happened in Ireland from the time of Parthalon, a lapse of some thousands of years, and related everything to St. Finnen of Magh Bile.

The Irish, too, had their were-wolf legends. It seems that there were certain persons among the inhabitants of Ossory‡ who, whenever they pleased, took the shape of wolves, and then ravaged and devoured cattle like real wolves, returning to their human shape when they thought they had enough of their pastime. Giraldus Cambrensis (Top. Hib., II., xix.) relates this great wonder in detail, as in operation in his own time, and believed every word of

\* Voyage of Bran, I. 49–52.

† Ogyg., Part. I

‡ Irish Nennius, 205.

it : and the legend is mentioned in the Norse Speculum Regale (p. 226, *supra*), as applying to all the Ossorians in turn (Folk Lore, v. 310). The wolf-transformation is mentioned in a sermon on the Resurrection in LU (p. 36, *b*), the oldest reference to it that we know. Stokes quotes from an old glossary the word *conoel*, as meaning " a woman that goes into wolf-shape " (*conrecht*), and another old word, pointing to a different transformation :—" *concl*, a woman that goes into the form of a little hound (*ciúánrecht*)."<sup>\*</sup> In the eighth or ninth-century story of the " Feast of Bricriu," figures a character named " Uath of the Lake," who was a sort of Irish Proteus : " A man of " great power indeed was that same Uath Mac Immomuin " (' horror son of terror '). He used to transform himself " into any shape pleasing to him, and he used to practise " enchantment (*druidecht*, ' druidism '), . . . and he was " called the *siritè* (' elf-man ') from the great number of " his transformations."<sup>†</sup> Numerous stories of this kind are found in Irish romance ; but I think the examples given here represent all the types of transformation believed in by the ancient Irish. These stories are scattered, and have no thread of connexion : they do not coalesce, into a system : they are told of individuals, in palpable exception to the general run of people, and many of them are stated to be the result of magical skill. There is no statement anywhere that all persons were re-born as human beings, or underwent transformations after death. Stories of a similar kind are current among most early nations. There are accordingly no grounds whatever for asserting that the ancient Irish believed in the doctrine of general metempsychosis ; and this is also O'Curry's conclusion.<sup>‡</sup>

<sup>\*</sup> Rev. Celt., II. 203.

<sup>†</sup> Ir. Texte, I. 293, and Fled Bricr., 97. For more information on these and such like transformations, see Voyage of Bran, I. 24 & 330 ; II. whole vol. : Rev. Celt., xv. 466 : Ir. Texte, III. 373 ; IV. 228.

<sup>‡</sup> Man. & Cust., II. 60.

10. *Turning 'Deisol,' or Sunwise.*

The Celtic people were, and still are, accustomed to turn sunwise—*i.e.* from left to right—in performing certain rites; and the word *deisiol* [deshil] was used to designate this way of turning: from *dess*, now *deas* 'the right hand': *dessel*, or *deisiol*, 'right-hand-wise.' This custom is very ancient, and, like many others, has descended from pagan to Christian times. It was, indeed, quite as common among the Christian people as among the pagans: but all that is necessary to say about it I will say here. It was not confined to the Celts; for, in classical writers, we find numerous allusions to it as it was carried out by the Latins and the Greeks. Martin (p. 117, &c.) describes it as practised in his day by the Scotie people of the Hebrides: and readers of Waverley will remember how the old leech made the *deasil* by walking three times in the direction of the sun round the wounded Edward, before beginning his examination of the wound. Even at this day, the Irish people, when burying their dead, walk at least once, sometimes three times, round the graveyard, sunwise, with the coffin.

No wonder that the custom was generally adopted by our Christian ancestors; for their great apostle Patrick showed them the example. After he had been presented with the site of his future cathedral at Armagh by *Darè*, on which then stood that chief's residence, the saint solemnly consecrated the whole place to the service of God by walking *dessil* round the rath, holding in his hand his crozier—the staff of Jesus—and followed in procession by all his attendant ecclesiastics.\* A century later St. Senan consecrated Scattery Island, in like manner, by walking right-hand-wise round it.† Another half century later still, St. Findchua, the warlike patron saint of

\* Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, 348.† *Ibid.*, 214.



Brigown, happened once to be in Tara, when a powerful force of British pirates landed on the coast, and marched towards the palace, plundering all before them. Findchua rapidly organised a defence party, and, directing them to march *dessil* to meet the invaders, *i.e.* to make a round-about right-hand-wise circuit, probably with the double object of complying with the old custom and of skilfully coming down on the enemy's flank—for Findchua was a born soldier—he accompanied them with martial ardour in his face—or as the old Life vividly puts it. “so that sparkles of fire flew forth from his teeth”—and falling unexpectedly on the marauders, made short work of them.\* The celebrated *Cathach*, the “Battle-book,” or *Praeliator* of the O'Donnells (p. 137, *supra*), was always borne three times right-hand-wise round their army before battle, to assure victory: it was so employed as late as the fifteenth century.

These are a few illustrations of the exercise of this *dessil* custom by the ancient Irish: but they might be multiplied indefinitely.

Sometimes persons went left-hand-wise (*tuathbel*) with a sinister intention, as the lady Boand went round Trinity well (p. 284, *supra*). In Scotland this left-hand turn is now called *withershins*, which is a Teutonic word.†

## II. *The Ordeal.*

The use of the ordeal for determining truth or falsehood, guilt or innocence, was developed from prehistoric times in Ireland: but the germs were, no doubt, brought hither by the earliest colonists. The Irish had their own ordeals, in which were some peculiarities not found among other nations of Europe. Most originated in pagan times,

\* Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, 236.

† For more about the Deisiul Turn, see Ferguson, in *Proc. R. I. A.*, 1870-76, p. 355: and Joyce, *Irish Names of Places*, II. 455.

but, as in other countries, the ordeal continued in use for many centuries after the general adoption of Christianity.\*

In the Book of Ballymote there is a list and description of twelve different kinds of ordeal used by the ancient Irish, which has been referred to by Mr. William Hennessy in an interesting paper on Irish Ordeals :† and more lately published and translated in full with the Irish text by Dr. Whitley Stokes.‡ In this it is stated that the twelve ordeals were arranged and proclaimed by King Cormac Mac Art in the third century at the *Féis* or Convention of Tara. All through this tract an ordeal is called *Fir-flatha* [feer-flaha], *i.e.*, ‘ Truth of sovereignty or kingdom.’ The following is the Ballymote list :—1, 2, 3. “ Morann’s three Collars ” : 4. “ Mochta’s Adze ” : 5. The “ Lot-casting of Sencha ” : 6. The “ Vessel of Badurn ” : 7. The “ Three Dark Stones ” : 8. The “ Caldron of Truth ” : 9. The “ Old Lot of Sen, son of Aige ” : 10. “ Luchta’s Iron ” : 11. “ Waiting at an Altar ” : 12. “ Cormac’s Cup.” Some of these are obviously legendary and fanciful : but that the greater number were in actual use is plain from the numerous references to them in the Brehon Laws, and other ancient Irish writings. Morann’s three collars were not much different from each other in their functions : and if they be regarded as one, which it is pretty certain they originally were, and if the two lot-castings (Nos. 5 and 9 above) are looked upon as modifications of a single one, this brings down the twelve Irish ordeals to nine, which was the usual number that prevailed all over Europe in the middle ages. It is curious that single combat or the duel is not included in the Irish technical list, though it prevailed as much in Ireland as elsewhere, as is shown at page 152, *supra*.

Numbers 1, 2, and 3. The common version of the legend of Morann’s collar is this :—that the great *brehon*

\* See Ware, *Antiqq.*, chap. xix.

† In *Proc. R. I. Acad.*, x. 34.

‡ In *Ir. Texte*, III. Another list, somewhat different, with descriptions, is given in *Br. Laws*, v. 471, 473.

or judge, Morann, had a collar, which, if placed round the neck of a judge, contracted on his throat if he delivered a false or unjust judgment, and continued to press more tightly, ever till he delivered a righteous one. Placed on the neck of a witness, if he bore false testimony it acted similarly, until it forced him to acknowledge the truth. In the Ballymote List it is stated that Morann had three collars : but as all were used for purposes similar to those just stated, they need not be described here.\*

4. The *Tál* [tawl] or adze of Mochta (a legendary carpenter) " was wont to be put into a fire made of black-thorn, or of quicken-tree [till it was red-hot], and the [tongue of the accused] was passed over it : it would burn the person who had falsehood : but would not burn the person who was innocent." A case of the application of this ordeal is mentioned by O'Curry,† taken from an ancient manuscript, where it is called a " druidical " or pagan test.

7. The *Tre-lia Mothair*, ' Three Dark Stones ' : a bucket was filled with bog-dust, charcoal, and other kinds of black stuff, and three little stones, white, black, and speckled, were put into it, buried deep in the black mass, into which the accused thrust down his hand : if he drew the white stone, he was innocent ; if the black one, he was guilty : and if he drew the speckled one, he was " half guilty."

8. The *Coire-fir* [curra-feer], ' caldron of truth,' was a vessel of silver and gold. " Water was heated in it till it was boiling, into which the accused plunged his hand : if he was guilty, the hand was burned : if not, it was " uninjured." This ordeal seems to have been often used : it is noticed in the *Senchus Mór* : and elsewhere in the *Brehon Laws* it is mentioned as a means of determining certain cases of doubtful family relationship.‡

\* They will be found described in *Ir. Texte*, III. 208.

† *Man. & Cust.*, I. 216.

‡ *Br. Laws*, I., 195, 199 ; IV. 285, 295.

9. *Crannchur*, or lot-casting (*crann*, 'wood': *cur*, 'casting'), of which two kinds (5 and 9) are mentioned: but it will be sufficient to describe the last one here. Three lots: one for the *flaith* or local lord, one for the ollave (who conducted the trial), and the third for the accused, were thrown into water. If the accused was guilty, his lot went to the bottom; if innocent, it floated. Ordeal by lot appears to have been oftenest used of any; but other forms, differing from the one described here, were more usual. It is very often mentioned in the Brehon Laws. If a man was accused of wrong by another, and if either demanded trial by lot, then lot was resorted to: and the plan adopted, as described in the book of Acaill,\* shows that here the ordeal was under the auspices of Christianity. Three lots were put into a vessel or bag, one for guilt, one for innocence, and one for the Trinity. If the accused first draws forth the lot for the Trinity, it is to be put back; and he is to draw again, till he brings forth either of the others, which determines the case. The lot for the Trinity must have been used as a sort of invocation to God for justice, and to add solemnity to the proceeding: otherwise it was useless.

If an animal out of some one of several herds did mischief, lots were first cast, as described in another part of the Book of Acaill, to find out the particular herd; after which the process was repeated, if necessary, till the lot fell on a particular animal, the owner of which had then to pay damages, assessed by a Brehon, who had to take into account several circumstances:—the actual amount of the damage; whether it was a first offence; whether the animal was known to be mischievous, implying carelessness in the owner, &c.† Similar proceedings were taken to discover the owners of bees that did damage. Lot-casting as an ordeal was quite as common among the ancient Irish as it was among the Homeric Greeks.

\* Br. Laws, III. 337.

† *Ibid.*, 439, 441.



10. *Iarn Luchta*, "Luchta's iron, [the use of] which the "druid Luchta learned in *Letha* (either Brittany or Italy) "when he went there to improve his knowledge." The druids having first uttered an incantation over a piece of iron, put it in a fire till it was red-hot. It was then placed in the hand of the accused: and "it would burn him if he had guilt: but would not injure him if innocent."

11. *Airisem ic altóir*, 'waiting at an altar.' The person was to go nine times round the altar, and afterwards to drink water over which a druid's incantations had been uttered. "If the man was guilty, the sign of his transgression was made manifest in him [by some bodily disfigurement]: if innocent, he remained unharmed." Notwithstanding the mention of the word 'altar,' this ordeal had nothing to do with Christianity: the legend states that it was borrowed from the Israelites by Cai Cainbrethach ('Cai of the fair judgments'), the original brehon who introduced it into Ireland: and Mr. Hennessy thinks it probable that this pagan circuit was made round a carn, to which the borrowed word *altóir* was applied: as Cormac uses the same word *altóir* for a pagan altar. This is rendered all the more likely from the fact that, before the battle of Cúl Dremne, St. Columkille denounces the half-pagan forces arrayed against his people as "the host that march round carns"—alluding, no doubt, to the practice of this pagan ordeal, or to some form of pagan worship. Probably the altar of the ordeal was one of those mentioned by Cormac (p. 289, *supra*), and was usually erected on a carn: this would fully reconcile all the statements. As corroborating the tradition that this rite was borrowed from the Jews, remark its striking similarity to the Jewish ordeal for a woman suspected of adultery (Numb. v.): that she was to drink bitter water over which the priest had heaped curses: if she was guilty, her flesh rotted: if innocent, she remained unharmed.

Trial by ordeal existed in Ireland before the arrival of

St. Patrick. But the saint himself, according to the seventh-century narrative of Muirchu, made use of the ordeal in his contest with King Laegaire's druid.\* Here, however, so far as Patrick was concerned, the proceeding was purely Christian: he called God to his aid; and there was no taint of paganism. The king proposed that the books belonging to each should be thrown into water: "Put your books into water, and we will worship him whose book escapes unharmed." Patrick agreed, but the druid declined on the grounds stated at page 289, *supra*. The king then proposed fire, but the druid again refused. At last Patrick himself challenged the druid to another test, to which he agreed—in an evil hour for himself. The druid and young Benen, one of Patrick's followers, exchanged mantles; and a house was hastily built up, one half of dry wood, and the other half of green. Into this house both were put, Benen at the dry side, the druid at the other, according to arrangement, and locked securely in. It was set on fire in presence of all, and while it was burning, Patrick remained praying. When the house had been burned down, and the fire had ceased, the spectators made a search, and found at the green side the druid reduced to ashes, with Benen's mantle untouched; and at the other side, Benen all joyful and quite safe, with the druid's mantle entirely consumed.

## 12. *Preference for Certain Numbers.*

The Irish, like most other ancient nations, had a decided preference for certain numbers and their combinations, which were mixed up with many of their religious and superstitious ceremonies, as well as with the affairs of ordinary life. We may see from the incident related by the seventh-century writer Muirchu, already noticed, that the number nine was regarded by the Irish pagans

\* Hogan, *Docum.*, pp. 38, 39; Trip. Life, 284.

with a sort of religious veneration, as bringing good luck :—That when King Laegaire, with his druids and pagan followers, was setting out from Tara for Slane to arrest St. Patrick, “ he had nine chariots joined together according to the tradition of the gods ” (p. 250, *supra*), in which he and the others rode. This is a corroboration—so far as that circumstance is concerned—by an unquestionable authority, of the accuracy of the tales, in which we find the combination of nine chariots often mentioned. In the story of the birth of Cuculainn, the Red Branch Knights yoke nine chariots to pursue a flock of enchanted birds.\* Lug the Ildana had nine chariots in the Battle of Moytura ;† and when Queen Maive rode at the head of her army to invade Ulster, she had a personal equipage of nine chariots—two in front of her, two behind, and two on each side, with her own in the middle (see II., 255, *infra*).

Still more frequently and prominently we find nine waves mentioned, and with similar mysterious virtues attributed to them. Morann, the celebrated judge, son of Carbery Cat-head, was born with a blemish so disfiguring that his father ordered him to be taken away and put to death. By the advice of an inhabitant of the fairy-hills he was taken to the sea and held on the surface till nine waves rolled over him : the moment the ninth wave had passed, the blemish disappeared.‡ When the Milesians invaded Ireland, the cunning Dedannans induced them to re-embark and go out nine waves from the shore : as soon as the ninth wave had been crossed, the magical power of the Dedannans was set free to act, so that they raised a tempest that destroyed nearly all the Milesian fleet. The belief about nine waves descended to Christian times. During the prevalence of the terrible yellow plague in Ireland, Colman O’Cluasaige [O’Cloosy], Ferleginn or head professor of St. Finnbarr’s School in Cork, fled over-

\* Miss Hull, Cuch. Saga, 15.

† Rev. Celt., XII. 103.

‡ Ir. Texte, III. 207.

sea, A.D. 664, with fifty of his pupils, to a certain island, so as to place nine waves between him and the mainland : " for the learned say "—the old document goes on—" that pestilence does not make its way farther than nine waves."\* Just before embarking he composed, as an invocation for protection against the terrible mortality, a hymn which is still extant and has been published by the Rev. Dr. Todd in the " Book of Hymns." The numbers three and seven are also much in evidence in Irish writings : but the full discussion of this subject would demand more space than I can afford.†

### 13. *The Evil Eye.*

From various passages in some very old documents, it may be inferred that the belief in the evil eye was very prevalent in Ireland in old times. Thus Cormac's Glossary (p. 107) gives a fanciful derivation of the common verb *milled* ('injuring'), making it a shortened form of *mí-shilled* [mee-hilleh], which is the same as a 'malign glance' of the eye. And in the Vision of Mac Conglinne (p. 92), the *féithliaig* or wizard-doctor says to his patient, who was looking very ill, "*Rottáraill súil nât-atbendach*," 'an eye that sains not has regarded thee' (i.e. 'an unwholesome or evil eye has looked on thee').

The great Fomorian champion, Balor of the Mighty Blows, had a tremendous evil eye called *Birach-derc* ('speary-eye': *bir*, 'a spear').‡ It was never opened except on the field of battle ; and it always took four men with hooks to raise the lid. One baleful glance was enough to enfeeble a whole army of his enemies, so as that a few brave men could put them to flight. The Tale of the second Battle of Moytura (p. 101) relates how he came by

\* Rev. Celt., ix. 118.

† See on this whole subject, De Jubainville, *La Civil. des Celtes*, pp. 256-284 : and for a full discussion on the Celtic preference for the number nine, see Rhys, *Hibb. Lect.*, Lecture iv.

‡ Rev. Celt. xii. 101, 113.



his evil eye. When he was a boy, his father's druids used to concoct their spells in a room carefully closed, *oc-fúlacht draidechta*, i.e., 'cooking sorcery' over a fire in a caldron, from some horrible ingredients, like Shakespeare's witches. The boy, curious to know what the druids were at, climbed up and peeped through an opening, when a whiff of foul steam from the caldron blew into his eye, and communicated to it all the baleful influence of the hellish mixture. But this eye, powerful as it was, was not proof against the *tathlum* or sling-ball of his grandson Lug of the Long arms. At the second Battle of Moytura, Balor was present, prepared to use his eye on the Dedannan army. But Lug, who was on the side of the Dedannans, kept on the watch; and the moment the lid of the Cyclopean eye was raised, and before the glare had time to work bale, he let fly the hard ball from his sling, which struck the open eye with such force as to go clean through eye, brain, and skull.

These observations may be brought to a close by the remark that the superstition of the evil eye has remained among our people—as among others—down to this day.

#### 14. *Geasa or Prohibitions.*

There were certain acts which people were prohibited from doing under penalty of misfortune or ill luck of some kind. Such a prohibition was called *geis* or *geas* [gesh, gass : *g* hard as in *get*, *gap*] : plural *geasa* [gassa]. A *geis* was something forbidden : somewhat resembling a taboo. Another term for a *geis* was *urgarad*, pl. *urgarta*. It was very dangerous to disregard these prohibitions. Because Conari the Great, king of Ireland in the first century of the Christian era, violated some of his *geasa*—most of them unwittingly—the peace of his reign was broken by plunder and rapine; and he himself was finally slain in the sack of Da Derga.\* Some *geasa* were binding on people in general.

\* See Stokes's *Introd. to the Bruden Da Derga*, and the story itself, in *Rev. Celt.*, xxii. See also the note on *Geasa*, in *Tromdamh*, p. 107.

Thus, on the day of King Laegaire's festival, it was *geis* for the people to light a fire anywhere round Tara till the king's festival fire had first been lighted.\* It was *geis* for anyone to bring arms into the palace of Tara after sunset. (Br. Laws, III. 83.)

The most interesting of the *geasa* were those imposed on kings: of which the object of some was obviously to avoid unnecessary personal danger or loss of dignity. For example, it was a *geis* to the king of Emain (*i.e.* of Ulster) to attack alone a wild boar in his den (Bk. of Rights, 249): a sensible restriction. According to the Book of Acaill and many other authorities, it was *geis* for a king with a personal blemish to reign at Tara (p. 43, *supra*): so that when the Great King Cormac Mac Art lost one eye by an accident, he at once abdicated. The reason of these two *geasa* is plain enough. But there were others which it is not so easy to explain. They appear to be mere superstitions—obviously from pagan times—meant to avoid unlucky days, evil omens, &c. Some kings were subject to *geasa* from which others were free. The king of *Emain*, *i.e.* of *Ulaid* or Ulster, was forbidden to listen to the singing of the birds of Lough Swilly, or to bathe in Lough Foyle on a May Day (Bk. of Rights, 249): and the law tract continues, that if he breaks through these, he shall not become king of Tara (*i.e.*, over-king) even though it should come to his turn to be *ard-ri*.

The king of Ireland and the provincial kings had each a series of *geasa* or *urgarta*. To the king of Ireland it was forbidden that the sun should rise on him while lying in bed in Tara, *i.e.*, he should be up before sunrise; he was not to alight from his chariot or horse on Moy Breagh on a Wednesday; he should not traverse Moy-Callainn after sunset, or incite his horse at Fán-Comair; he was not to enter North Teffia on a Tuesday, or go on board ship on the Monday after May Day, or lead his army across Ath

\* Three Irish Homilies, 21.

Maighne (a ford on the river Inny) on the Tuesday after the 1st November, or go round North Leinster left-hand-wise under any circumstances.\* We cannot assign a reason for any one of these strange *geasa*.

Some of them—perhaps most—arose from the horror of some former catastrophe; the memory of which has been lost. For example, when Maive's champion, Loch, elects to meet Cuculainn in single combat, he refuses to fight at a certain ford, because his brother had been killed there: and the combat goes on at the next ford above.† Individuals were often under *geasa* to follow or refrain from certain lines of conduct, the prohibitions being either taken on themselves voluntarily, or imposed on them, with their consent, by others. Fergus Mac Roy, ex-king of Ulster, was under *geasa* not to accept an invitation to a banquet—*i.e.*, he was obliged to accept it: it was a *geis* of Finn Mac Cumail to sleep more than nine nights running at Allen. There were many *geasa* on Cuculainn, one of which forbade him to pass by a cooking fire without turning aside to visit it and tasting the food: and another to refuse any man's challenge to combat.

Sometimes persons used *geasa* to obtain a request: and when the request was reasonable, just, and necessary, the abjured person could not refuse without loss of honour and reputation. Hence, the demand was often put in some such form as "I place you under heavy *geasa*, which no true champion will break through, to do so and so." In this manner, the witch-lady—in the Story of the Chase of Slieve Culainn—forces Finn to search for the ring she had dropped into the lake:‡ and Marbhan put the arch-poet, Senchán Torpest, under *geasa* to obtain a copy of the lost story the Táin bo Quelna.§

It is well known that *geasa* or prohibitions were, and

\* For all these and others, see Book of Rights, pp. 3-15.

† Miss Hull, Cuch. Saga, 166.

‡ Joyce, Old Celtic Romances, 354.

§ Oss. Soc. Trans., v. 103.

are still, common among all people, whether savage or civilised. They flourish at this day among ourselves. People will not dine in a company of thirteen, or remove to a new house on a Saturday, or get married in May: what are these but *geasa*, and quite as irrational as any of those enumerated above?

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## CHAPTER X

### CHRISTIANITY

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#### SECTION I. *Christianity before St. Patrick's Arrival.*



It will not be expected that this short chapter should contain anything like a comprehensive essay on the ancient Irish Church. I will merely touch on some religious points characteristic of Ireland, and on some others which, though not peculiar to our country, are not very generally known.

That there were Christians in Ireland long before the time of St. Patrick we know from the words of St. Prosper of Aquitaine, who lived at the time of the event he records. He tells us that, in the year 431, Pope Celestine sent Palladius "to the Scots believing in Christ, to be their first bishop": and Bede repeats the same statement. Palladius landed on the coast of the present County Wicklow, and after a short and troubled sojourn he converted a few people, and founded three little churches in that part of the country, namely, Cill Fine, Tech-na-Roman ('House of the Romans'), and Domnach Arte. The Rev. John Francis Shearman has undertaken to identify these,





FIG. 76.

Killen Cormac: a pre-Patrician Church site. (From Miss Stokes's *Christian Inscriptions*, vol. II., p. 2; and that from Father Shearman's *Paper in Kilk. Arch. Journ.*, 1872-3, p. 341.)

and his identifications are probably correct.\* It may be considered certain that Cill Fine, or, as it was also called, Cill-Fine-Cormaic [pron. Killeena-Cormac,] is the venerable little cemetery, now called Killeen Cormac, in the townland of Colbinstown in Wicklow, three miles southwest from Dunlavin, and nearly midway between that village and Ballitore. It is believed that this was the burial-place of the poet Dubthach, converted by St. Patrick, and of his three sons; and here stands the bilingual ogham stone mentioned in next chapter, which was their monument.†

Besides these direct records, the existence in Ireland of pre-Patrician Christianity is alluded to in some very old native traditions, preserved in the Lives of St. Patrick.‡ There must have been Christians in considerable numbers when the Pope thought a bishop necessary; and such numbers could not have grown up in a short time. It is highly probable that the knowledge of Christianity that existed in Ireland before the arrival of Palladius and Patrick (in 431 and 432, respectively) came from Britain, where it is pretty certain there was a well-established Christian Church in the third or fourth century,§ or at any rate where there were large numbers of Christians from a very early time. When we consider the constant intercommunication that existed in those ages between Ireland and Britain (p. 75, *supra*), it would be strange indeed if the faith did not find its way to Ireland. However, the great body of the Irish were pagans when St. Patrick arrived in 432; and to him belongs the glory of converting them.

\* See Father Shearman's Essays in Kilk. Arch. Journ., vol. for 1872-3 (especially p. 359), and succeeding volumes. Also his *Loca Patriciana* (especially from p. 1 to p. 110).

† See *Loca Patriciana*, p. 46; and the references in Macalister's *Studies in Irish Epigraphy*, Part I., p. 78.

‡ See Trip. Life, 313, 5; 325, 11; 329, 7; 493, first extract: and Todd, *St. Patk.*, 270. There is also the legend that King Cormac Mac Art was a Christian.

§ See Todd, *St. Patk.*, 265.

As St. Patrick and his companion missionaries found few terms in the Irish language that could be used to designate the offices and ceremonies of Christianity, they had to borrow numerous words for the purpose from Latin, or from Greek through Latin, which became changed in form to suit the Irish laws of pronunciation. Hence, Irish *sacart*, or *sagart*, 'a priest,' from *sacerdos* (originally pronounced *sakerdos*) ; *epscop*, or *espoc*, or *easpog*, 'a bishop,' from *episcopus* ; *cill* [kill], or *cell*, or *ccall*, 'a church,' from *cella* [originally pron. *kella*] ; *eclas*, or *caglas* [agglas], 'a church,' from *ecclesia* ; *regles*, 'a church,' a compound of the same word ; *tempull*, 'a church,' from *templum* ; *domnach*, 'Sunday,' and also 'a church,' from [*Dies*] *dominica* ; *baisleac*, 'a church,' from *basilica* ; *clerech*, 'a clergyman,' 'a scholar,' from *clericus* ; *ab*, or *abb*, 'an abbot,' from *abbas* ; *monach*, 'a monk,' from *monachus* : *afrend*, *oifrend*, or *aifrionn*, 'the Mass,' from *offerenda*. Another Irish word for a priest, far less common than *sacart*, is *cruimther* [criffer]. According to Cormac's Glossary (p. 30), the Irish borrowed *cruimther* from the Welsh *prenter*, for " *prem*, in the Welsh "—as he says—" is *cruim* in the Gaelic " (by the usual change of *p* to *c*) : while the Welsh borrowed their *prenter* from *presbyter*. Also *Notlac*, or *Notlaic* (modern *Nodlog*, or *Nodlaig*), 'Christmas,' from Lat. *Natalicia*, 'a birthday feast' : and *Cáisc*, Easter, from *Pascha*. In Ireland the same person was usually door-keeper and bell-ringer\* : hence the word *aistreóir*, or *aistire* [ashtrore, ashtiré], derived from Lat. *ostiarius*, 'a janitor,' was the usual Irish term for a bell-ringer.† *Caillech*, 'a nun,' is one of the few Irish ecclesiastical terms not derived from Latin : in an old Life of St. Brigit, it is stated to be derived from *caille*, 'a veil' :—*caillech*, the 'veiled one.' *Caillech*, 'a nun,' is to be distinguished from *caillech*, 'an old woman,' 'a hag.'

\* See the passage quoted further on (p. 376) about *aistreóir*.

† See Petrie, Round Towers, p. 382.

## 2. *The three Orders of Irish Saints.*

In an old Catalogue, written in Latin by some unknown author, not later than A.D. 750,\* published by Ussher, and recently by the Marquis of Bute, from an independent authority, the ancient Irish saints are distinguished into three "Orders"; and much information is given regarding them. The following are the main points of this valuable old document; the very words being given (in translation with quotation marks) as far as may be found convenient.

"The First Order of Catholic Saints" were all bishops, beginning with St. Patrick: they were "most holy" (*Sanctissimus Ordo*), "shining like the sun." They were 350 in number, all founders of churches; and they freely employed both laymen and women in the service of the houses of residence; because, as they themselves were "founded on the rock of Christ, they feared not the blast of temptation." "All these bishops"—the Catalogue goes on to say—"were sprung from the Romans, and Franks, and Britons, and Scots"; that is, they consisted of St. Patrick, with the numerous foreign missionaries who accompanied or followed him, and of the Britons and native Scots, or Irish, ordained by him and his successors. This order continued for "four reigns," namely, "during the time of Laegaire, and Olioll Molt, and Lugaid, son of Laegaire, and Tuathal Maelgarbh": *i.e.*, for something more than a century.

"The Second Order was of Catholic Priests," numbering 300, of whom a few were bishops. They did not allow women to serve in the monasteries. These were "very holy" (*sanctior*), and "they shone like the moon." They lasted for "four reigns; that is, from the latter years of

\* Stokes, *Mart. of O'Gorman*, xlvi. The whole document is given in English translation, from Ussher's copy, in Todd's *St. Patk.*, p. 88. Todd fixes the approximate date as 750. Prof. J. B. Bury, in his scholarly article on Tirechan's Memoir, expresses the opinion that it may possibly belong to the end of the seventh cent. (*Eng. Hist. Review*, 1902, p. 253, note 65).



“Tuathal Maelgarbh, and during the whole of King  
 “Dermot’s reign, that of [Domnall and Fergus] the two  
 “grandsons of Muredach, and of Aed, son of Ainmire”:  
 a little more than half a century.

The Third Order consisted of priests and a few bishops:  
 these were “holy” (*sanctus*), and “shone like the stars.”



FIG. 77.

Doorway of St. Mary's Church, Glendalough. (From Journ. Soc. Antiqq. Irel., for 1900, p. 310.)

They numbered 100, all of whom lived in desert-places, refusing to possess private property, and subsisting on herbs and water, and on the alms of the faithful. “These  
 “lived during four reigns;\* that is, the reigns of Aed

\* There are discrepancies between the statement of kings and reigns in this List and the lists of kings given in the oldest and best-established

“ Allain (who, in consequence of his evil devices, reigned  
 “ but three years), and of Domnall, and during the joint  
 “ reigns of [Kellach and Conall] the sons of Maelcoba, and  
 “ of Aed Slaine : and they continued to the great mortality ”  
 (A.D. 664) : *i.e.*, for a little less than three-quarters of a  
 century.

This old catalogue, though a little highly coloured, after the fashion of the times, and too precise to be accepted literally in all particulars, describes, with general correctness, three phases in the development of the early Church in Ireland. Put into matter-of-fact language, the historical statement is briefly this :—

1. For a little more than a century after St. Patrick's arrival, the work of conversion was carried on by the Patrician clergy and their successors, who were nearly all active missionary priests. Many belonging to this order were foreigners.

2. During the latter half of the sixth century, monasteries spread rapidly over the country, and monastic clergy then and for long afterwards greatly predominated. Nearly all belonging to this order and the third were natives.

3. From the end of the sixth century, for seventy or eighty years, eremitical communities, settled in remote and lonely places, became very general. It will be worth while to describe these three religious developments in some detail.

### 3. *The First Order : Patrician Secular Clergy.*

During the century and a quarter following St. Patrick's arrival, *i.e.*, from A.D. 432 to about 559, the clergy who laboured to spread the faith among the people appear to have been for the most part unconnected with monasteries : in other words, they corresponded to the present secular

authorities. On this point see Lanigan's observations, *Eccl. Hist.*, II. 331, note III. A correct list of Irish kings, with dates, is given at the end of chapter III., *supra*.

or parochial clergy. But though they commonly remained in the several districts where they settled and built their churches, and though there was a sort of understanding that each had charge of the people who inhabited a district extending some distance round his church, which the others took care not to encroach on, nevertheless the district over which each exercised jurisdiction was not well defined. Bishops, as we shall see, were appointed, not to districts,

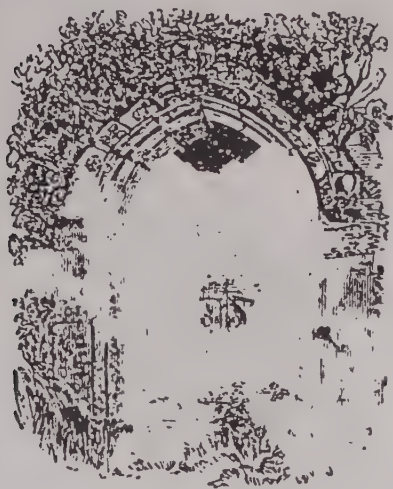


FIG. 78.

Doorway of the Hermitage of St. Erc, one of St. Patrick's converts, and first bishop of Slane: beside the Boyne, near Slane, in Meath: a relic of the Patrician clergy. The present building was erected long after the time of St. Erc. (From Wilde's *Boyne and Blackwater*. Drawn by Wakeman.)

but to tribes and monasteries.

Still, as a tribe occupied a portion of the country moderately well defined, the jurisdiction of the bishop of the tribe extended over that district, so that this tribal arrangement contained the germs of diocesan distribution. The exact topographical limits of the several dioceses were laid down for the first time at the synod of Rathbrassil about the year 1118.\*

The Patrician clergy, as they may be called, were the First Order of Saints. Among them were many distinguished

bishops, some of whom are named in the catalogue. There were monasteries and schools† also during the whole of this period, and many of the abbots were bishops: but monasteries did not constitute the main feature of the ecclesiastical system: for the life of St. Patrick, and, it may be added, the life of the First Order of saints in general, was, as Dr. Healy (p. 146) remarks, “too full of missionary

\* See Lanigan, iv. 42: Todd, *St. Patk.*, 38: Reeves, *Eccl. Ant.*, 126, 127: and Adamn., 65, notes *a* and *b*. † See Dr. Healy, 66, 91, 98, 122.

labours to be given to the government or foundation of monasteries." During this period, therefore, the clergy devoted themselves entirely to the home mission—the conversion of the Irish people—which gave them quite enough to do. For more than thirty years they were led by their great master, with all his fiery and tireless energy. After his death, his disciples and their successors con-



FIG. 79.

Killashee, or Killossy, near Naas in Kildare, a Patrician foundation. It was the Church of Bishop Usaille, Ausaille, or Auxilius, one of the missionaries who accompanied St. Patrick to Ireland. Hence the name *Cill Ausaille*, from which the present name was contracted. No part of Auxilius's original church remains; but the round tower, which stands on a square base, indicates the antiquity and importance of the place. (From Miss Stokes's *Early Christian Architecture*. Drawn by Petrie.)

tinued the work. But the struggle became a hard one: for the druids seem to have somewhat recovered the influence they had lost during St. Patrick's life, and exerted themselves to the utmost to retard and limit the spread of the faith; and besides this, many unconverted pagans still remained in most parts of the country.\*

\* Dr. Healy, 61, top.



#### 4. *The Second Order : Monastic Clergy.*

**Rise of Monasticism.**—About the middle of the sixth century a great monastic religious movement took its rise, mainly from the monastery and college of Clonard, founded by St. Finnen about the year 527.\* He had spent many years in Wales ; and soon after his settlement at Clonard, great numbers of disciples, attracted by his learning and holiness, gathered round him. Under him



FIG. 80.

Ancient baptismal font of Clonard : three feet high : still preserved in the church there. (From Wilde's *Boyne and Blackwater*.) Not a vestige of any old building remains on the site of this great monastery.

were educated and trained for monastic and missionary work many of the most illustrious fathers of the Irish Church, including the " Twelve Apostles of Erin " :† so that St. Finnen, who was a bishop, is called " a doctor of wisdom, and the tutor of the saints of Ireland in his time " (O'Clery, *Cal.*, 333). Most of his disciples spent some time also

under the spiritual instruction of the holy and venerable St. Enda in his monastery in Aranmore, who had also studied for a time in Wales. These men, going forth from Clonard in all directions, founded, in imitation of

\* For a full account of the foundation and work of this great college see Dr. Healy, *Irel. Anc. Schools*, 199.

† The ' Twelve Apostles of Erin ' were :—Kieran of Saighir or Seirkieran ; Kieran of Clonmacnoise ; Columba or Columkille of Iona ; Brendan of Clonfert ; Brendan of Birr ; Columba of Terryglass in Tipperary ; Molaisse or Laserian of Devenish ; Canice of Aghaboe ; Ruadan or Rodan of Lorrha in Tipperary ; Mobi of Glasnevin ; Sinnell of Cleenish in Lough

their master Finnen, numerous monasteries, schools, and colleges, which subsequently became famous throughout all Europe. And now new life and vigour were infused into the Irish missionary Church ; and the work of Patrick and his companions was carried on with renewed zeal and wonderful success. The influence of the druids was finally broken down, though they still lingered on, but obscurely and feebly, for many generations. Then also arose the zeal for preaching the Gospel in foreign lands, that gave rise to that vast emigration of Irish missionaries and scholars spoken of farther on. By far the greatest part of the ecclesiastical literature of Ireland relating to those ages is concerned with monastic clergy, both priests and bishops, and with their labours as missionaries, scholars, and teachers.

**Monastic Life.**—The religious houses of this second class of Irish saints constituted the vast majority of the monasteries that flourished in Ireland down to the time of their suppression by Henry VIII. These are the monasteries that figure so prominently in the ecclesiastical history of Ireland : and it will be interesting to look into them somewhat closely and see how they were managed, and how the monks spent their time.

The organisation of the Irish Church, and especially of monasteries, was modelled on that of society in general : it was tribal ; and the tribal customs pervaded all the arrangements of the monastery. Bishops and priests were attached to tribes and monasteries, having, as already remarked, no well defined territorial jurisdiction. In a

Erne ; and Nenni or Nennius of Inishmacsaint in Lough Erne. This list is given by Todd (St. Patk., 99, note 1), from the Latin Life of St. Finnen. But the List of the Twelve Irish Apostles given in the notes on the Feilire of Oengus in LB (Stokes, Feilire, 118), is somewhat different. The Feilire List has Finnen of Clonard, Finnen of Magh Bhile (Movilla), and Comgall of Bangor, instead of Kieran of Seirkieran, Molaisse of Devenish, and Sinnell of Cleenish, who are in Todd's List. In the remaining nine the two Lists agree.

passage in the Lebar Brecc it is stated :—" In Patrick's " Testament [it is decreed] that there be a chief bishop " for every tribe in Ireland, to ordain ecclesiastics, to " consecrate churches, and for the spiritual direction of " princes, superiors, and ordained persons."\* The head of a monastery was both abbot and chief over the community. For spiritual direction, and for the higher spiritual functions, such as that of ordination, confirmation, consecration of churches, &c., a bishop was commonly attached to every large monastery and nunnery. In all matters concerned with discipline and with the general arrangements of the monastery, the abbot, in his temporal capacity of chief, had jurisdiction over the bishop, as over all the others : but in the spiritual capacity he was under the authority of the bishop, who also commanded the personal respect due to his high office. We have one instance related by Adamnan, where St. Columkille, in Iona, humbled himself reverentially in presence of a bishop—a visitor—whom he treats as his spiritual superior.† Bede, speaking of Iona in his time, says :—" That " island is governed by an abbot, who is a priest, to whose " authority [in disciplinal matters] all the province, and " even the bishops, are subject, after the example of their " first teacher [Columba], who was not a bishop, but a " priest and monk."‡ But the abbot of a monastery might be, and often was, a bishop ; in which case no other bishop was necessary.§

The mode of electing a successor to an abbot strongly resembled that for the election of chief. He should be chosen from the *finè* or family of the patron saint ; if for any reason this was impossible, then from the tribe in

\* Trip. Life, clxxxii.

† See Innes, Hist. of Scotl., Book II., xxxiii. : Adamn., I. 44 : and Keat., 450, 451.

‡ Eccl. Hist., III. iv.

§ The custom of having a bishop in a monastery under the authority of the abbot was not peculiar to Ireland : see Todd, St. Patk., p. 54 *et seq.*

general ; and if none were found fit in these two, one of the monks was to be elected.\* One consequence of the tribal organisation was a tendency to family succession in ecclesiastical or semi-ecclesiastical offices, as in the lay professions. The office of *erenach*, for instance, was hereditary in a family ; and in times of confusion—during the Danish disturbances—when many disciplinary abuses crept in—the offices of bishop and abbot were kept in the same family for generations. Nay, even laymen often



FIG. 81.

"St. Columb's or Columbkille's House," at Kells, Co. Meath: interior measurement about 16 feet by 13 feet: walls 3 feet 10 inches thick. An arched roof immediately overhead inside: between which and the steeply-sloped external stone roof is a small apartment for habitation and sleeping, 6 feet high. A relic of the second order of saints, and probably coeval with St. Columbkille, sixth century. (From Petrie's *Round Towers*, p. 430.)

succeeded to both ; but this was in the capacity of chief ; and they sometimes had the tonsure of the minor orders, so that they got the name of clerics, which they really were not.† But such men had properly ordained persons to discharge the spiritual functions.

\* Stokes, *Trip. Life*, 339 (*Feth Fio*) : *Br. Laws*, III, 73. 75.

† *Cambrensis*, *Top. Hib.*, III. xxvi.



The monastic discipline\* was very strict, turning on the one cardinal principle of instant and unquestioning obedience. Each of the most distinguished founders drew up a "Rule" for his own monastery and for all those founded by him, or under his authority as head:—a set of regulations as to devotions, food, time for retiring and rising, occupations, and so forth, which were strictly followed in daily life. Every monastery followed some Rule, whether drawn up by its own head or adopted. Several of these Rules have come down to us, and give an excellent idea of the austere conditions under which those old monks lived. In some monasteries the Rule prohibited them from going beyond the outer *liss* or enclosing wall without special leave.†

There was to be no idleness: everyone was to be engaged, at all available times, in some useful work; a regulation which appears everywhere in our ecclesiastical history; and concerning which numerous references might be given. This love of work is well illustrated in the legend that St. Mailruan of Tallaght never heard the confession of any man who did not support himself by labour.‡ The great anxiety of the communities was to support themselves by the work of their hands, so as to depend as little as possible on the charity of others:§ and this laudable custom was followed not only at home, but also on the Continent by those emigrant Irish monks who founded monasteries there. We read in the Bollandists|| about seven brothers who went from Ireland to Gaul in the sixth century "on a pilgrimage for the love of Christ." They settled near the river Marne: and the old biographer goes on to state:—"They did not live merely on the charity of

\* On discipline see Adamn., 343: Dr. Healy, 150: and Lanigan, iv. 348, 349, 354, 357, 360.

† For Monastic Rules see O'Curry, MS. Mat., 373: and for a particular one, Reeves, Culdees.

‡ Silva Gad., 40.

§ Lanigan, iv. 355, 356.

|| A. SS., Feb. 27 & Oct. 3: Miss Stokes, Three Months in France, xxii.

“those whom the pious president [St. Remi] had commended them to, but also on their own industry and the labour of their hands, in accordance with the customs of the religious bodies of Ireland.”

Let us now glance at the various employments of those busy Irish communities.\* The monasteries of the second order were what

are commonly known as cenobitical establishments: *i.e.* the inmates lived, studied, and worked in society and companionship, and had all things in common: and they attended Mass and other devotions as a congregation in the church of the monastery. In sleeping accommodation there was much

variety; in some monasteries each monk having a sleeping-cell for himself; in others three or four in one cell. In some they slept on the bare earth: in others they used a skin, laid perhaps on a little straw or rushes. Their food was prepared in one large kitchen by some of their own members specially skilled in cookery; and they took their meals in one

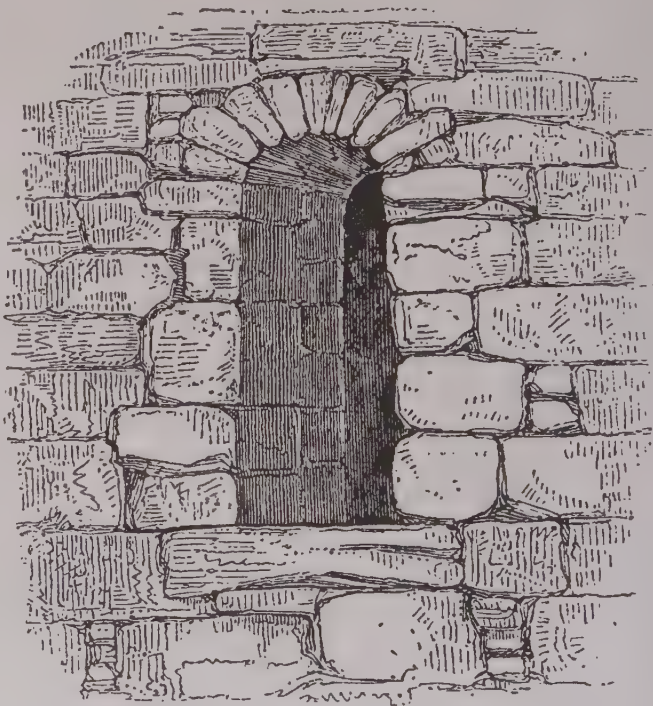


FIG. 82.

Doorway of Round Tower, Tory Island. (From Petrie's Round Towers.) To illustrate sloping jambs, sect. 6, below.

\* On this see also Dr. Healy, 155: Reeves, *Eccl. Ant.*, 130-195: and Adamn., 363, top.

common refectory. The fare, both eating and drinking, was always simple, and generally scanty, poor and uninviting; and the fasts were frequent and severe: but on Sundays and festival days, and on occasions when distinguished persons visited, whom the abbot wished to honour, more generous food and drink were allowed.

When the founder of a monastery had determined on the neighbourhood in which to settle, and had fixed on the site for his establishment, he brought together those who had agreed to become his disciples and companions, and they set about preparing the place for residence. They did all the work with their own hands, seeking no help from outside. While some levelled and fenced-in the ground, others cut down, in the surrounding woods, timber for the houses or for the church, dragging the great logs along, or bringing home on their backs bundles of wattles and twigs for the wickerwork walls. Even the leaders claimed no exemption, but often worked manfully with axe and spade like the rest. When St. Patrick was journeying through Connaught, one of his disciples, Bishop Olcan, wishing to found a church for himself, and having obtained his master's sanction, "went forth with his axe on his shoulder," ready to begin his work with his own hands.\*

Every important function of the monastery was in charge of some particular monk, who superintended if several persons were required for the duty, or did the work himself if only one was needed. These persons were nominated by the abbot, and held their positions permanently for the time. In an ancient ms., quoted by Stokes we read:—"For Enda's honourable school [in the "island of Aran] Mochuda did the fishing, Ciaran had the "drying of corn, and Ailbe the bell-ringing and door-keeping."† Over the general daily arrangements presided an officer, called in Irish *fer-tighis* ("man of the house"), and in Latin commonly known as the *œconomus*.

\* Trip. Life, 137.

† Reference to this passage lost.

He was a sort of house-steward, "whose duty was to look "after the domestic or internal affairs of the monastery, to "see that the house was supplied with fuel and all other "necessaries."\* This arrangement, it will be observed, was nearly identical with the institution of *rechtaire* in great lay houses (p. 64, *supra*).

There was a tract of land attached to almost every monastery, granted to the original founder by the king or local lord, and usually increased by subsequent grants : so that agriculture formed one of the chief employments. This industry was introduced with Christianity, even by St. Patrick himself. We read in the Tripartite Life (p. 237) that on one occasion, Patrick's *Munter*, or household, were reaping corn on a farm they had *made*, i.e. fenced in and reclaimed, at a place called *Trian Conchobair*, near Armagh ; and that they became very thirsty ; whereupon the saint sent them a vat (*drolmach*) of whey-water. We gather too, from the same passage, that they worked on this farm from tierce to vespers, i.e. from about 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and taking this along with the suffering from thirst, and the various other duties they had to perform, we see that they were at real work—not mere recreation.

When returning from work in the evening, the monks brought home on their backs whatever things were needed in the household for that night and next day. Milk was often brought in this manner in a vessel specially made for the purpose : and it was the custom—a very pleasing one—to bring the vessel straight to the abbot, that he might bless the milk before use.† In this field-work the abbot bore a part in several monasteries : and we sometimes read of men, now famous in Irish Church history—abbots and bishops in their time—putting in a hard day's work at the plough. The younger monks worked more than the others : and hence the word *scológ* [skulloge], which literally

\* Todd, St. Patk., 166 : see also Reeves, Adamn., 365.

† Adamnan, p. 125.



signifies a 'scholar,' or learner (from *scol*, 'a school'), has come down to our time to denote a small farmer who works his own land.\* The effects of the monks' superior tillage are seen in many places to this day, where round the monastic ruins there is an extent of rich land, much superior to that lying beyond.† Those who had been tradesmen before entering were put to their own special work for the use of community and guests. Some ground the corn with a quern or in the mill; some made and mended clothes; some worked in the smith's forge or in the carpenter's workshop; while others baked the bread or cooked the meals.‡

Attached to every cenobitical monastery was a *tech-óiged*, 'guest-house,' or hospice (*tech*, 'a house': *óigi*, 'a guest': modern form *aoidhcadh*—pron. ee-a) for the reception of travellers, generally placed a little apart from the monks' cells: an institution as old as the time of St. Patrick. Some of the inmates were told off for this duty, whose business it was to receive the stranger, take off his shoes, wash his feet in warm water,§ and prepare supper and bed for him. Hospitality was enjoined, not only as a social virtue, but as a religious obligation. "Reception of strangers"—says the Brehon Law (v. 121, 27)—"is incumbent on every servant of the church"; and in an ancient Irish sermon on Doomsday, we read:—"The Lord "will say to the just, 'I was in need of a guest-house (*tech-aiged*) and ye gave me hospitality.'""|| Adamnan (p. 27) records that once, when St. Columba expected a guest at Iona, he told the brethren to prepare the *hospitium* (the Latin equivalent of *tech-óiged*), and to have water ready to wash the stranger's feet. St. Ciaran of Clonmacnoise visits Saigir (now Seirkieran, in King's County), on whose arrival the other Ciaran, abbot of Saigir, says to

\* See Mac Conglinne, 13, 21.

† See, for example, Adamnan, 209.

‡ See Kilk. Arch. Journ., 1899, p. 229 § Stokes, Lives of SS., 150, par. 52.

|| Stokes, in Rev. Celt., iv. 247.

him apologetically (the fire having been unexpectedly put out):—"The first thing ye [*i.e.* the guest and his "companions"] need is water to wash your feet, but just "now we have no means of heating water for you."\* Mac Conglinne (p. 10), grumbling at the inhospitable



FIG. 83.

St. Douglough's Church, four miles north of Dublin: illustration of a stone-roofed church ("Churches," *infra*). St. Dúilech, from whom this was named, was one of the early Irish saints: he settled here and built a little church: but the present church, figured here, does not appear older than the thirteenth century. (From Wakeman's Handbook of Irish Antiquities.)

treatment he received in Cork monastery, complains, as a great grievance, that on his arrival no one came to the guest-house to wash his feet, so that he had to wash them himself.

Three days and three nights seem to have been the regular time for which guests were to be entertained free,

\* Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, 277.

beyond which there was no further obligation, and the hosts were free to entertain or not : just as we find among the Jews :—" Now in those places were possessions of the chief man of the island [Melita], named Publius, who receiving us, for three days entertained us courteously " (Acts xxviii. 7). This custom obtained in lay as well as in monastic life : and both in the Irish Tales and in the Lives of the Saints, entertainment for three days and three nights is so constantly mentioned as to render reference to instances unnecessary.

There was a guest-house also attached to the principal nunneries, with a man-servant to attend. A chief named Coirpre, or Carbery, arriving at St. Brigit's Convent in Kildare, was brought to the guest-house (*tech-óiged*). Brigit asked the *timthirig* ('man-servant') who it was that had arrived. " Just one young man," said the servant. " Look again," said Brigit. Then he went and looked more closely : and he now saw that the stranger had a little babe clasped in his bosom. Brigit baptised the child, who afterwards became the illustrious St. Tigernach of Clones.\* In the houses of chiefs and other lay persons who could afford it there was also a *tech-óiged*, generally one large apartment, kept specially for the reception of travellers, as we find mentioned in many passages of our old writings : and here also the custom was followed of washing the stranger's feet ; which was often done by a handmaid.†

In those early times there were in every part of the country monasteries, convents, and hostels or houses of public hospitality (for which last see vol. II. p. 166) : so that travellers were very well off in the matter of shelter and entertainment : much better off indeed in one respect than we are now : for we have to pay pretty smartly for the hospitality shown us, while they had everything free. After the time of the Anglo-Norman Invasion, however,

\* Feilire, 72, 73.

† *Ibid.*, 48, 4.

the hostels became fewer and gradually disappeared : and then the monasteries were the only houses of hospitality, with the exception of the dwellings of those chiefs who kept up the old custom. That the monasteries continued to discharge this most excellent function, as well as that of education, as zealously as ever, down to the time of their suppression, we have many evidences both in native writing and in the government state papers : of which one will be sufficient. When Henry VIII.'s order for suppression was issued, the Irish lord deputy (Lord Leonard Gray) and the Dublin council petitioned the king in 1539 to exempt six from the order :—St. Mary's Abbey and Christ Church, both in Dublin ; the Nunnery of Grâce Dieu near Swords ; Great Connell in Kildare (near Kilcullen) ; and Kells and Jerpoint, both in the County Kilkenny. And they give their reasons, which show the almost incredible sacrifices made by the monasteries and nunneries to entertain their guests :—

“ For in those houses commonly, *and other such like*, in defaute of comen innes, which are not in this land, the King's Deputie, and all other his Grace's Counsaell and Officers, also Irishmen, and others resorting to the Kinge's Deputie in ther quarters, is and hath been most comenlie loged at the costes of the said houses. Also in them yonge men and childer, both gentlemen childer and others, both man kynd and women kynd, be brought up in vertue, lernyng, and in the English tongue and behavior, to the great charges of said houses : that is to say, the women kynd of the hole Englishrie of this land, for the more part in the said Nunrie [Grâce Dieu], and the man kynd in the other said houses. Also at every hosting, rode, and journey, the said houses in ther [own] propre costes fyndethe [entertainment for] as many men of warr, as they are apoynted by the Kinge's Deputie and Counsaell for the same.”

The petition was unavailing, however ; and these six went with the rest.\*

\* State Paper, Hen. VIII., Irel., iii. 130. See also Register of All Hallows, xxv.



In the educational establishments, teaching afforded abundant employment to the scholarly members of the community. Others again worked at copying and multiplying books for the library, or for presentation outside ; and to the industry of these scribes we owe the chief part of the ancient Irish lore, and other learning, that has been preserved to us. St. Columkille devoted every moment of his spare time to this work, writing in a little wooden hut that he had erected for his use at Iona, of which there are many incidental notices by Adamnan and other biographers. It is recorded that he wrote with his own hand three hundred copies of the New Testament, which he presented to the various churches he had founded. Some spent their time in ornamenting and illuminating books—generally of a religious character, such as copies of portions of Scripture : and these men produced the wonderful penwork of the Book of Kells and other such manuscripts.\* Others were skilled metal-workers, and made crosiers, crosses, bells, brooches, and other articles, of which many are preserved to this day, that show the surpassing taste and skill of the artists. But this was not peculiar to Irish monks, for those of other countries worked similarly. The great St. Dunstan, we know, was an excellent artist in metal-work. Some of the Irish monks too were skilled in simple herb remedies, and the poor people around often came to them for advice and medicine in sickness. When a monastery was situated on the bank of a large river where there was no bridge, the monks kept a curragh ready to ferry travellers across, free of charge.†

Giraldus Cambrensis, in his *Topography of Ireland* (II. xxxiv.), gives us an account of St. Brigit's perpetual fire at Kildare :—" Among those [wonderful things], the

\* For an interesting account by Dr. Reeves of the work of one Irish scribe, Muiredach Mac Robhartaigh, who died 1088, see *Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad.*, VII. 293.

† Dr. Healy, *Irel. Anc. Schools*, 427.

“first to be noticed is the fire of St. Brigit, which is  
 “called the inextinguishable fire. Not that it cannot be  
 “extinguished, but the nuns and holy women watch it  
 “and supply fuel so carefully that from the time of that  
 “virgin it has continued to burn through a long course of

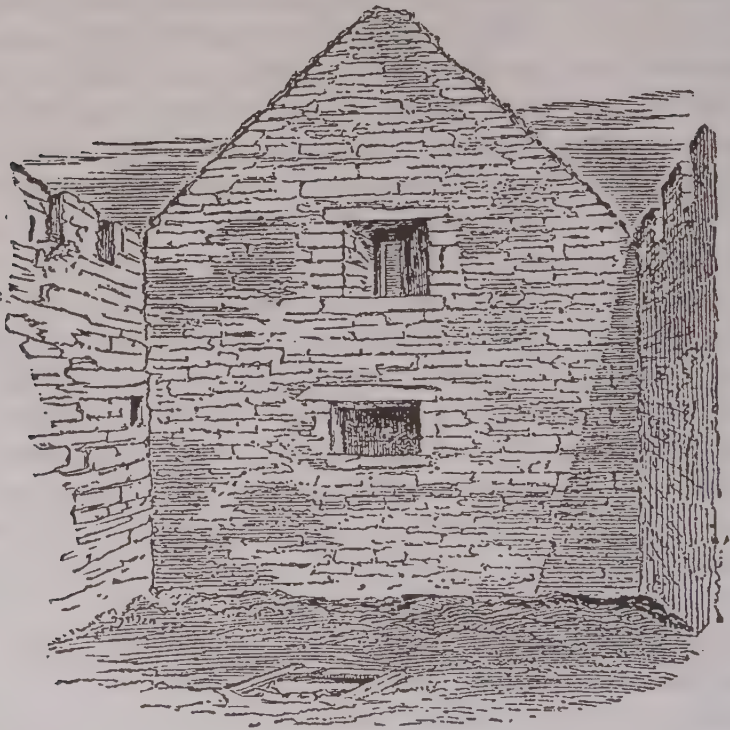


FIG. 84.

Tempull-na-teinead [tinnē], 'Church of the Fire,' interior view, where the perpetual fire was kept up, at Inishmurray, off the coast of Sligo. The ancient hearth is seen in the foreground. (From Kilk. Arch. Journ. for 1885-6, p. 226. Drawn by Wakeman.

“years” [more than six centuries and a half]. After the time of Giraldus it was kept up till Henry de Londres, the English Archbishop of Dublin, disregarding the local devotional feeling, put it out in 1220: but it was soon after relighted, and continued to burn till the final suppression of the monasteries by Henry VIII.\* This custom

\* Ware, *Antiqq.*, 237.

was not peculiar to Kildare, but was pretty general in Ireland: for we find in the native records accounts of perpetual fires kept up in several monasteries, in each of which a small church or oratory was set apart for the purpose: as, for instance, at Seirkieran, Kilmainham, and Inishmurray.\*

Besides the various employments noticed in the preceding pages, the inmates had their devotions to attend to, which were frequent, and often long: and in most monasteries they had to rise at the sound of the bell in the middle of the night, and go to the adjacent church to prayers. Going to bed and rising were, however, very simple matters: the monks merely lay down in their day clothes—except the outer coat—on their hard and comfortless sleeping-places, so as to be prepared to rise the moment the bell struck, as some orders of the regular clergy do at the present day.

**Conversion of England and Northern Scotland.**—Towards the end of the sixth century the great body of the Irish were Christians, so that the holy men of Ireland turned their attention to the conversion of other people. Then arose—almost suddenly—an extraordinary zeal for spreading the Gospel in foreign lands and hundreds of devoted and determined missionaries left our shores. By a curious custom, not found elsewhere, each chief missionary going abroad brought with him twelve companions, probably in imitation of the twelve apostles, of which the reader may see many examples in Lynch's *Cambrensis Eversus*, chap. xxv., and in Reeves's *Adamnan*, 299. But sometimes they went in much larger bodies.

On every side we meet with evidences of the activity of the Irish in Great Britain. Northern and western Scotland were evangelised by St. Columba and his monks from Iona, and the whole western coasts of England and Wales

\* See Stokes's *Lives of SS.*, 277, 358: *Kilk. Arch. Journ.*, 1879, p. 51, and 1885, pp. 225-229: O'Grady, *Silva Gad.*, 15, 16, 41.

abound in memorials of Irish missionaries.\* Numbers of the most illustrious of the Irish saints studied and taught in the monastery of St. David in Wales; St. Dunstan was educated by Irish monks in Glastonbury, as his biographer, William of Malmesbury, testifies; and there is good reason to believe that Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, one of the most illustrious of the saints of Britain, was a native of Ireland. Lanigan, in his Ecclesiastical History (II. 174), writes:—

“Those [early Saxon] converts were not indebted for their faith to Augustine, or the other Roman missionaries, who had not yet [*i.e.* at the time mentioned] arrived in Great Britain, nor to British preachers; whereas the Britons, as Gildas and Bede have complained, added to their other crimes the horrid sin of neglecting to announce the Gospel to the Anglo-Saxons.† On the contrary, the Irish clergy and monks undertook the duty as soon as a fit opportunity occurred, and have been on that account praised by Bede. It can scarcely be doubted that they were the instruments used by the Almighty for the conversion of those early Anglo-Saxon Christians in Columba’s time; and that, with regard to a part of that nation, they got the start of the Roman missionaries in the blessed work of bringing them over to the Christian faith.”

It is now admitted that England owes its conversion to Irish missionaries—partly from Iona and partly from the mother country—more than to Augustine and the Roman monks. “St. Augustine arrived in England in 597”—writes Bishop Reeves‡—“and Paulinus was ordained archbishop of the Northumbrians in 625: but “Christianity made little way in the province till Aidan “began his labours in Lindisfarne in 634.” St. Aidan was an Irishman, descended from the same kingly race as St. Brigit;§ he was educated at home, and, like so many of his countrymen, entered the monastery of Iona. After some time, he was commissioned by the abbot and monks

\* See Lynch, *Cambr. Ev.*, II. 289 to 301.

† See Bede, *Eccl. Hist.*, I. xxii. (where Gildas is referred to).

‡ In *Ulster Journ. of Archæol.*, VII. 231.

§ O’Clery’s *Cal.*, 31st Aug.



to preach to the Northumbrian Saxons, at the request of their good king Oswald that a missionary might be sent, this king being himself a zealous Christian who had



FIG. 85.

Chancel arch of Monaincha, near Roscrea in Tipperary (forming doorway between nave and chancel). (From Miss Stokes, *Inscriptions*, II. 36.) To illustrate observation about chancel arch, see p. 355, *infra*.

spent some years in exile in Ireland, where he had been converted and received his education. Aidan, who had been consecrated a bishop, chose as his place of residence

the little island of Lindisfarne, where he founded the monastery that became so illustrious in after-ages. For thirty years—634 to 664—this monastery was governed by him and by two other Irish bishops, Finan and Colman, in succession. Aidan, assisted by a number of his fellow-countrymen, laboured zealously, and with wonderful success, among the rugged Northumbrian pagans. “Many of the Scots”—writes Bede\*—“came daily into Britain, “and with great devotion preached the Word to those “provinces of the English over which King Oswald “reigned.” These earnest men had the hearty co-operation and support of the king, of which Bede has given an interesting illustration in a passage where he tells us that as Aidan, on his arrival in Northumbria, was only imperfectly acquainted with the language, King Oswald, who had learned the Irish tongue while in Ireland, often acted as his interpreter to the people.†

Montalembert, in his account of his mission, writes :—

“Forty-eight years after Augustine and his Roman monks landed on the shores of pagan England, an Anglo-Saxon prince [Oswald] invoked the aid of the monks of Iona in the conversion of the Saxons of the north. . . . The spiritual conquest of the island [Britain], abandoned for a time by the Roman missionaries, was now about to be taken up by the Celtic monks. The Italians [under Augustine] had made the first step,‡ and the Irish now appeared to resume the uncompleted work. What the sons of St. Benedict could only begin, was to be completed by the sons of St. Columba.”§

A recent distinguished writer belonging to the Anglican Church, Dr. Lightfoot, bishop of Durham, is even more explicit on this point. Having remarked that Iona was the cradle of English Christianity, he quotes Montalembert

\* Bede, Eccl. Hist., Book III., chap. vii.

† *Ibid.*, Book III., chaps. iii. and xxv.

‡ But see Lanigan's observations, p. 337, *supra* : the monks from Ireland were beforehand with St. Augustine.

§ Montalembert, Book XI., chap. i.

as saying :—" Of the eight kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxon " Confederation, that of Kent alone was exclusively won " and retained by the Roman monks." The following are the words of Dr. Lightfoot himself, speaking of Aidan :—

" Though nearly forty years had elapsed since Augustine's first landing in England, Christianity was still confined to its first conquest, the south-east corner of the island, the kingdom of Kent. . . . Then commenced those thirty years of earnest energetic labour, carried on by those Celtic missionaries and their disciples, from Lindisfarne as their spiritual citadel, which ended in the submission of England to the gentle yoke of Christ " (Lightfoot, " Leaders in the Northern Church," 1890, p. 9). Again (p. 11) he claims " for Aidan the first place in the evangelisation of our race. Augustine was the apostle of Kent, but Aidan was the apostle of England."\*

In the early Christian ages, communication with Rome from Ireland was always difficult and tedious : for generations indeed it was almost impossible, on account of the disturbed state of the intervening countries, caused by the irruptions of the northern hordes, who formed an impassable barrier between the western islands and Italy. Accordingly, information regarding alterations in disciplinary matters made from time to time by the authorities in Rome took long to reach these islands : and when tidings of them did come, their genuineness, or the duty of complying with them, was often open to question. Yet during all this time, it is interesting to observe with what unflinching, and, as it were, instinctive reverence, the Irish—as well indeed as the British—Christians looked to Rome as the centre of authority. During the sixth, seventh, and succeeding centuries, Irish pilgrims—both lay and clerical—were constantly going to Rome, as we know by the testimony, not only of native records, but

\* Bede (*Eccl. Hist.*, Book III., chap. v.) gives an interesting and sympathetic sketch of Aidan : and in several parts of his History mentions him in terms of the utmost admiration and reverence. See Cardinal Moran's sketch of Aidan in *Trans. Ossory Arch. Soc.*, I. 455 : and Lanigan II. 416, 424.

also of many foreign writers. Ricemars, bishop of St. David's in the tenth century, in his *Life of St. David*, speaks of "the inextinguishable desire of the Irish [of the "early centuries] to visit the relics of the apostles St. Peter "and St. Paul" [at Rome].\* In one of the canonical decrees attributed to St. Patrick, or, if not by him, issued by the Irish bishops soon after his time, a direction is given that when any difficult religious question arose in Ireland, which could not be settled at home, it should be referred to the chair of St. Peter.† There is at least one interesting instance where this was actually done: namely, during the time of the dispute about celebrating Easter, when the Irish method differed from that of Rome (pp. 387, 388, *infra*). About the year 630 some wise and learned men were sent by the Irish ecclesiastical authorities to Rome "as children to their mother"—says the old record—to ascertain for a certainty what the practice was there. After an absence of three years they returned and declared that the Roman custom was followed by the whole world, and that the Irish custom was wrong. On this the people of the southern half of Ireland adopted the Roman method: but those of Iona and the north of Ireland clung for some time longer to their old custom, having received no authoritative decree in the matter.

**Missions to Foreign Lands.**—Whole crowds of ardent and learned Irishmen travelled to the Continent, in the sixth, seventh, and succeeding centuries, spreading Christianity and secular knowledge everywhere among the people. "What," says Eric of Auxerre (ninth century), in a letter to Charles the Bald, "what shall I

\* On Irish pilgrimages to Rome, see Wattenbach in *Ulst. Journ. Archæol.*, vii., 238 and 242. This stream of pilgrims to Rome continued uninterruptedly for many centuries. In the year 1064, Brian Boru's son Donogh, king of Munster, and "king of Ireland with opposition," was deposed; and, taking a pilgrim's staff, he fared to Rome, where he laid his crown at the feet of the pope. Here he died very penitently in the monastery of St. Stephen the Martyr (FM, A.D. 1064).

† Stokes, *Trip. Life*, 356, 506.



“say of Ireland, who, despising the dangers of the deep,  
 “is migrating with almost her whole train of philosophers  
 “to our coasts? ”\* ‘A characteristic still more distinctive  
 “of the Irish monks”—writes Montalembert†—“as of all  
 “their nation, was the imperious necessity of spreading  
 “themselves without, of seeking or carrying knowledge  
 “and faith afar, and of penetrating into the more distant



FIG. 8a.

Cave or Hermitage of St. Columbanus, near Luxeuil, in France. St. Columbanus was a native of Leinster, and was one of the greatest of Irish missionaries to the Continent. (From Miss Stokes's *Three Months in the Forests of France*, p. 24.) (See p. 345 below.)

“regions to watch or combat paganism ”; and a little further on he speaks of their “passion for pilgrimage and preaching.” “Not England or Scotland only”—writes Dr. Lightfoot (p. 7)—“but large parts of the Continent  
 “also were Christianised by those Irish missionaries,  
 “either from their adopted home in Iona, or from their  
 “mother country.”

\* Moore, *Hist of Ireland*, i. 299.

† Montalembert, *Monks of the West*, Book vii.

For our knowledge of those noble and devoted missionaries, we are indebted almost wholly to foreign sources: for once they left their own country, the native Irish annalists made no record of them, except in a very few cases.\* These men, on their first appearance on the Continent, caused much surprise, they were so startlingly different from those preachers the people had been accustomed to. They generally—as we have said—went in companies. They wore a coarse outer woollen garment, in colour as it came from the fleece, and under this a white tunic of finer stuff. They were tonsured bare on the front of the head, while the long hair behind flowed down on the back: and the eyelids were painted or stained black. Each had a long, stout *cambutta*, or walking-stick: and slung from the shoulder a leathern bottle for water, and a wallet containing his greatest treasure—a book or two and some relics. They spoke a strange language among themselves, used Latin to those who understood it, and made use of an interpreter when preaching. But when they settled down for any length of time, they learned and used the native dialect: as, for instance, St. Gallus, the patron saint of St. Gall in Switzerland. For writing purposes, they used *pugillares*, or waxed tablets (Irish *pólaire*, for which see p. 482, below).

Few people have any idea of the trials and dangers they encountered. Most of them were persons in good position, who might have lived in plenty and comfort at home. They knew well, when setting out, that they were leaving country and friends probably for ever; for of those that went, very few returned. Once on the Continent, they had to make their way, poor and friendless, through people whose language they did not understand, and who were in many places ten times more rude and dangerous

\* The reasons for this will be found fully set forth by Dr. Reeves in *Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad.*, vii., p. 290.

in those ages than the inhabitants of these islands : and we know, as a matter of history, that many were killed on the way. Yet these stout-hearted pilgrims, looking only to the service of their Master, never flinched. They were confident, cheerful, and self-helpful, faced privation with indifference, caring nothing for luxuries ; and when other provisions failed them, they gathered wild fruit, trapped animals, and fished, with great dexterity and with any sort of next-to-hand rude appliances. They were rough and somewhat uncouth in outward appearance : but beneath all that they had solid sense and much learning. Their simple ways, their unmistakable piety, and their intense earnestness in the cause of religion caught the people everywhere, so that they made converts in crowds.\*

Irish professors and teachers were in those times held in such estimation that they were employed in most of the schools and colleges of Great Britain, France, Germany, and Italy. The revival of learning on the Continent was indeed due in no small degree to those Irish missionaries ; and the investigations of scholars among the continental libraries are every year bringing to light new proofs of their industry and zeal for the advancement of religion and learning. To this day, in many towns of France, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, Irishmen are venerated as patron saints. Nay, they found their way even to Iceland ; for we have the best authority for the statement that when the Norwegians first arrived at that island, they found there Irish books, bells, crosiers, and other traces of Irish missionaries, whom the Norwegians called *Papas*.† But the most interesting and decisive notice of the connexion of the Irish with Iceland

\* Much of this is condensed from the Essays of two learned Germans, Dr. Wattenbach and Dr. Ferdinand Keller, translated and annotated by Dr. Reeves in, *Ulst. Journ. Arch.*, VII. and VIII. See also Miss Stokes, *Early Christian Art*, 34, 35.

† Moore, *Hist. of Ireland*, II. pp. 3, 4.



is by the Irish geographer Dicuil, in his work *De mensura provinciarum orbis terræ*, where—writing in 825—he states that about thirty years previously (*i.e.* in 795) he was told by some Irish ecclesiastics who had sojourned in Iceland from February to August, that in midsummer the sun hardly sets there, so that people have sufficient light to transact their ordinary business all night through.\* Europe was too small for their missionary enterprise. We find a distinguished Irish monk named Augustin in Carthage in Africa, in the seventh century: and a learned treatise by him, written in very elegant Latin, on the “Wonderful things of the Sacred Scripture,” is still extant, and has been published. During his time, also, two other Irish monks named Baetan and Mainchine laboured in Carthage. There were settlements of Irish monks also in the Faroe and Shetland Islands.†

All over the Continent we find evidences of the zeal and activity of Irish missionaries. Twelve centuries after this host of good men had received the reward they earned so well, an Irish pilgrim of our own day—Miss Margaret Stokes—traversed a large part of the scene of their labours in Southern Europe, in a loving and reverential search for relics and memorials of them: and how well she succeeded, how numerous were the vestiges she found—abbeys, churches, oratories, hermitages, caves, crosses, altars, tombs, holy wells, baptismal fonts, bells, shrines, and crosiers, beautiful illuminated manuscripts in their very handwriting, place-names, passages in the literatures of many languages—all with their living memories, legends and traditions still clustering round them—she has recorded in her two charming books, “Six Months in the Apennines,” and “Three Months in the Forests of

\* For Dicuil see Reeves, *Ulst. Journ. Arch.* vii., 231, note γ: Lanigan, iii. 225 to 228: Ware, *Irish Writers at Dicuil*: Hyde, *Lit. Hist.*, 222: Johnston, *Landnama Boc*, cited by Lanigan, iii. 226.

† Reeves, on Augustin, *Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad.*, vii. 514.



France." May she be welcomed by those she revered and honoured\* "

"The Irish passion for pilgrimage and preaching" never died out : it is characteristic of the race. This great missionary emigration to foreign lands has continued in a measure down to our own day : for it may be safely



FIG. 87.

Bas-relief, representing St. Columbanus taming two bears, carved on one side of the sarcophagus in which he is buried at Bobbio in Italy. This memorial of a great Irish missionary is figured and described by Miss Stokes in *Six Months in the Apennines* (p. 158), from which this illustration has been taken.

asserted that no other missionaries are playing so general and successful a part in the conversion of the pagan people all over the world, and in keeping alight the lamp of religion among Christians, as those of Ireland. Take up any foreign ecclesiastical directory, or glance through any newspaper account of religious meetings or ceremonies, or

\* See also Paper by Miss Stokes in *Kilk. Arch. Journ.*, 1870-71, p. 352, for specimens of Irish art now in Bavaria, taken from a Paper by Wattenbach.

bold missionary enterprises in foreign lands ; or look through the names of the governing bodies of Universities, Colleges, and Monasteries, in America, Asia, Australia, New Zealand—all over the world—and your eye is sure to light on cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests, principals, professors, teachers, with such names as Moran, O'Reilly, O'Donnell, MacCarthy, Murphy, Walsh, Fleming, Fitzgerald, Corrigan, O'Gorman, Byrne, and

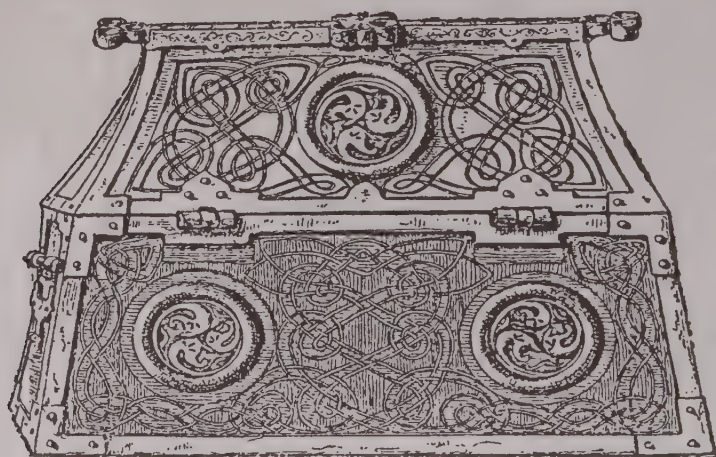


FIG. 88.

A shrine, now preserved in the Copenhagen museum, showing the *Opus Hibernicum*: one of the Continental traces of Irish missionaries. This shrine was made either by an Irish artist, or by one who had learned from Irish artists. (From Journ. Roy. Soc. Antiqq. Irel., 1892, p. 355.)

scores of such-like, telling unmistakably of their Irish origin, and proving that the Irish race of the present day may compare not unfavourably in missionary zeal with those of the times of old. As the sons of Patrick, Finnen, and Columkille took a leading part in converting the people of Britain and the Continent, so it would seem to be destined that the ultimate universal adoption of Christianity should be mainly due to the agency of Irish missionaries.

5. *The Third Order : Anchorites, or Hermits and Hermit Communities.*

Although the monasteries of the second order were, as we have seen, cenobitical (p. 327, *supra*), nevertheless, during the whole of this period, and indeed from the time of St. Patrick, individuals often chose a solitary life, withdrawing themselves from all companionship with their fellows, and passing their time, as hermits, in prayer and contemplation. For it was considered that a life of solitude afforded an opportunity of more perfect union with God. A characteristic example was St. Domangart or Donard, one of St. Patrick's disciples, who built his little hermitage of stone on the very summit of Slieve Donard, the highest peak of the Mourne Mountains : and in this awful solitude he lived and communed with God for many years. And the name of the mountain keeps his memory fresh to this day.

Sometimes an individual took up his abode near the monastery, still retaining his connexion with it : others left it for good, and went to some out-of-the-way place at a distance. Each had a little cell, commonly put up by his own hands, in which he spent his life, meditating and praying, sleeping on the bare earthen floor, and living on herbs and water, or on an occasional alms from some visitor. These cells were sometimes of stone—what we now call a *clochan*, a beehive-shaped hut, of which many examples still remain. We have numerous notices of individual hermits during the period of the Second Order of Saints. Adamnan tells us that, in the time of St. Columba, who was himself one of the Second Order, a certain monk named Finan “led the life of an anchorite blamelessly for many years near the monastery of Durrow.”\*

The spot where an anchorite lived was often called by the Irish name *Disert*, meaning an unfrequented place,

\* Adamn, p. 95 : see also p. 366, same work.



a hermitage, a word borrowed from Latin *desertum*. So general was this custom that there are more than a score places in Ireland still called, either wholly or partly, by this name *Disert* or *Desert*. And these represent only a small proportion of the hermitages of those times. It often happened that a *disert* was kept up near a monastery, either for the use of those of the community who wished to retire for a time into solitude, or for any devotee who chose to take up his temporary abode in it. Sometimes



FIG. 89.

A *clochan*, or beehive-shaped house, of dry masonry, on Church Island, in Currane Lough, near Valencia, in Kerry. A Christian cell: see last page. (From Journ. of Roy. Soc. Antiqq. Irel., 1900, p. 153.)

the abbot himself, when he could be spared from the monastery, retired to the *disert* to commune more closely with God.\*

Not unfrequently those bent on hermit life embarked in a currach to find some desert island where they might stay for ever unknown. Adamnan (II. xlii) tells us that, in the time of Columba, Cormac Ua Liathain sailed out on the western ocean three several times to find a desert island on which to settle, but failed each time: and on one of these occasions he reached the Orkneys. Adamnan

\* Adamn., 366: Dr. Healy, 470.



(I. xx) mentions another voyage for a similar purpose, undertaken by a monk named Baithen. As an example of the all but inaccessible places these men ventured on and lived in, may be mentioned Bishop's Island near Kilkee, a sea-rock, surrounded by sheer cliffs 200 feet high, where, to this day, can be plainly seen from the adjacent mainland the remains of two primitive clochans, in which one or more of those hermits lived in the olden time. But the history of the settlement on this island is totally lost.\*

While, as we have seen, there were individual hermits from the very beginning, the desire for eremitical life became very general about the end of the sixth century. Then not only individuals, but whole communities of monks, sought a solitary life. The leader of a colony of intended recluses went with his followers to some remote place, in a deep valley surrounded by mountains, forests, and bogs, or on some almost inaccessible little island, where they took up their abode. Each man built a cell for himself: and these cells, with a little church in the midst, all surrounded by a low *cashel*, *rath*, or wall, formed an eremitical monastery: a monastic group like those known in the east by the name of "Laura." Each monk passed the greater part of his life in his own cell, holding little or no communication with his fellows, except only at stated times in the day or night, when all assembled in the church for common worship, or in the refectory for meals. They cultivated a vegetable garden for food: and it must often have gone hard with them to support life. The remains of these little monasteries are still to be seen in several parts of Ireland, both on the mainland and on islands: as, for instance, at Gougane Barra lake, the source of the Lee in Cork; on Inishmurray, off the Sligo coast; on Ardoilen, a little ocean-rock off the coast of Galway, where a *laura* was founded by St. Fechin in the seventh century;

\* See O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, II. 67.

and on the Great Skellig off the Kerry coast, where there still remains an interesting group of clochans that may be seen figured in the *Kilkenny Archæological Journal*, 1890-91, p. 662.

There is a graphic description of one of these hermit monasteries in the "*Voyage of St. Brendan.*" Barinthus, giving St. Brendan an account of a visit to Mernoc's



FIG. 90.

Present appearance of Gougane Barra on a little island in the lake. St. Barra or Finnbar, the patron of Cork, settled here with his hermit community, who built little cells and a church, in the end of the sixth century : of which remains are still to be seen. A memorial of the Third Order of Saints, (From Mrs. Hall's *Ireland*.)

island monastery, says :—" As we sailed to the island, the brethren came forth from their cells towards us like a swarm of bees, for they dwelt apart from each other, having one refectory, one church for all, wherein to discharge the divine offices. No food was served out but fruits and nuts, roots, and other vegetables. After complin [the last prayer at night] they slept in their

“respective cells till the cock crew or the bell sounded for morning prayer.”\*

These hermit-communities were the Third Order of Saints, who are very correctly described in the old Catalogue. It is stated that they lasted till the time of the Yellow Plague in 664: from which we may infer that the plague made such havoc among them as to break up the system of eremitical monasteries. During this time the cenobitical or ordinary monasteries must have been considerably disturbed and repressed by the departure of whole bodies of their inmates: but after 664 they resumed their sway. Long after this however we find numerous records of individual hermits.†

**Culdees.**—There is good reason to believe that the Third Order of Irish Saints includes the class of monks designated by the Irish term *Céile-Dé* [*Cailġ-Dé*], or, as it is usually Anglicised, Culdee. Who were the Culdees? On this question there has been much uncertainty and much speculation. It has been investigated by Dr. Reeves in an exhaustive essay: and Mr. Skene, in his “Celtic Scotland,” has thrown much additional light on it. Many other writers on Irish ecclesiastical history have more or less dwelt on the subject.

The term *Céile-Dé* has been variously translated “servant” or “spouse,” or “companion” of God: for *Céile* has all these meanings. As applied to monks it does not appear in the Irish records till towards the close of the seventh century; and it seems to have been generally applied to a cleric or monk who either actually was, or had been, a recluse or anchorite. It was not applied to all anchorites, but only to those ascetics, whether individuals or communities, who were distinguished for unusual

\* Card. Moran, *Acta S. Brend*, 86, 87: O'Donohue, *Brendaniana*, 112. For more about these island monasteries, see the Rev. George Stokes's Paper in *Kilk. Arch. Journ.*, 1890-91, p. 358.

† For examples, see Reeves, *Adamn.*, 366.



austerity and holiness of life. *Céile-Dé* appears to be the equivalent of the Latin *Deicola* (God-worshipper), in the sense of a person having a very close companionship with God, rather than of *Servus-Dei*, which was applied to monks in general. It will be seen then that at best the term "Culdee" is somewhat vague, and in course of time it came to be used with much latitude. Besides individual Culdees, there were many Culdee communities, both in



FIG. 91.

Ruins of Kilcrea Abbey, on the River Bride, ten miles from Cork city. The virgin saint *Crédh*, or Crea, founded a nunnery here in early ages, dedicated to St. Brigit. The Franciscan monastery, of which the ruin is shown in fig 91, was founded by Cormac *Láidir* MacCarthy, in 1465, on the same site; and it is a memorial of St. Brigit, as it was dedicated to her. (From Mrs Hall's Ireland.)

Ireland and Scotland: Dr. Reeves, in his essay describes eighteen altogether, nine in each of the two countries.

From all that has been said, it will be obvious that the three orders overlapped as regards time; so that no hard and fast line can be drawn between them; though this is done in the Catalogue.

There were nuns and convents in Ireland from the time of St. Patrick, as we know from his "Confession," and from his "Epistle to Coroticus": nevertheless it may



almost be said that St. Brigit of Kildare was the founder of the Irish conventual system. With the space at disposal here, however, it would be impossible to enter on a history and description of convent life in Ireland: and I must content myself with referring to Lanigan's "Ecclesiastical History," *passim*, or indeed to any good Ecclesiastical History of Ireland; and to the Most Rev. Dr. Healy's "Ireland's Ancient Schools and Scholars," pp. 106-121.

#### 6. *Buildings and other Material Requisites.*

**Churches and Monastic Buildings.**—The custom of building in wood, which was characteristic of the ancient Irish people, will be noticed in chap. xx, vol. II. pp. 21-27. Nearly all the churches in the time of St. Patrick, and for several centuries afterwards, were of wood, as we know from numerous passages in the ancient ecclesiastical literature. St. Finan, an Irish monk from Iona, on becoming bishop of Lindisfarne, A.D. 652, built a church there, which, in the words of the Venerable Bede, "was not, however, of stone, "but altogether of sawn oak, and covered with reeds *after the manner of the Scots.*"\* The custom continued long, not only among the native Irish, but among the English settlers. St. Malachy O'Morgair, archbishop of Armagh, who died in 1148, began to build a large church of stone at Bangor, like those he had seen on the Continent, which was even at that period considered so unusual a thing that the natives were all astonished; and one, bolder than the rest, said to him:—"What has come over you, good man, "to introduce such a building? We are Scots, not Gauls, "and want no such novelties. How do you think you "can find the means, or live long enough, to finish it?"† But the ancient churches were not universally of wood: for little stone churches were erected from the earliest Christian times.

\* Eccl. Hist., III. xxv.    † Petrie, R. Towers, 123: Ware, Antiqq. 181

The early churches, built on the model of those introduced by St. Patrick, were small and plain, seldom more than sixty feet long, sometimes not more than fifteen, always a simple oblong in shape, never cruciform. Some of the very small ones were oratories for private or family devotions. Oratories were common, both in monasteries and elsewhere. At first they were nearly always of wood, as their Irish name, *derthech*, or *duirthech* ('oak-house'), denotes. But at an early period they began to be built of



FIG. 92.

St. Mac Dara's primitive church on St. Mac Dara's Island off the coast of Galway.  
Interior measurement 15 feet by 11 feet. (From Petrie's Round Towers.)

stone: and the ruins of these little structures still remain in many places. As Christianity spread, the churches became gradually larger and more ornamental, and a chancel was often added at the east end, which was another oblong, merely a continuation of the larger building, with an arch between (see fig. 85, p. 338, *supra*). The jambs of both doors and windows inclined, so that the bottom of the opening was wider than the top: this shape of door or window is a sure mark of antiquity (see for examples, figs. 77, 82, 93). The doorways were commonly

constructed of very large stones, with almost always a horizontal lintel: the windows were often semicircularly arched at top, but sometimes triangular-headed. The remains of little stone churches, of these antique patterns, of ages from the fifth century to the tenth or eleventh, are still to be found all over Ireland.\* The small early churches, without chancels, were often or generally roofed

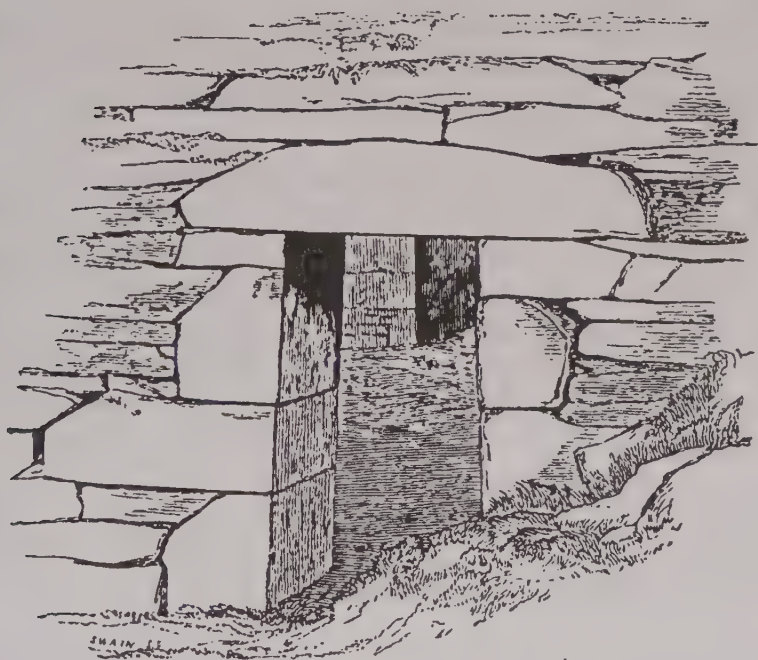


FIG. 95.

Doorway of Tempull Cainhain in Aran. (From Miss Stokes's Inscriptions, II., p. 23.)

with flat stones, of which Cormac's chapel at Cashel (vol. II., Title-page), St. Doulogh's Church near Dublin (p. 331, *supra*), St. Columb's house at Kells (p. 325, *supra*), and St. Mac Dara's Church (p. 355, *supra*), are examples (Petrie, "Round Towers," 186). In early ages churches were often in groups of seven—or intended to be so—a

\* Some even of the early churches were highly ornamented, such as the great church of Kildare, as described by Cogitosus, for which see Lanigan, IV. 342: Dr. Healy, 114: Petrie, Round Towers, 197, 198, 199.

custom still commemorated in popular phraseology, as in "The Seven Churches of Glendalough" (Trip. Life, clvii).

In the beginning of the eleventh century, what is called the Romanesque style of architecture, distinguished by a profusion of ornamentation—a style that had previously been spreading over Europe—was introduced into Ireland. Then the churches, though still small and simple in plan, began to be richly decorated. We have remaining numerous churches in this style: a beautiful example is Cormac's chapel on the Rock of Cashel, erected in 1134 by Cormac Mac Carthy, king of Munster (figured on Title-page of second volume).

The general—almost universal—practice was to build the churches east and west, with the entrance at the west end, and the altar at the east. This is mentioned in many passages of our ecclesiastical literature, of which the oldest is the prophecy of King Laegaire's druids regarding the coming of the Taillkenn, *i.e.* St. Patrick, which is quoted and translated into Latin by Muirchu in his seventh-century memoir of St. Patrick:—

"The Taillcenn will come over a furious sea,  
His mantle [*i.e.* the chasuble] head-holed, his staff crook-headed,  
His dish [*i.e.* the paten] in the east of his house,  
All his household shall answer Amen, Amen!"\*

Very likely this was a real prophecy, though having nothing supernatural about it: for as there was much communication in the fifth century between Ireland and foreign countries—Britain as well as the Continent—the druids had probably heard of the advance of Christianity and of its main ceremonials. But be this as it may, the passage proves that Patrick adopted the east and west position for his churches. A few were placed north and south; in fact the very first building that St. Patrick

\* Stokes. Trip. Life, 35. See also Petrie, Tara, 77: Todd, St. Patk., 411: O'Curry, MS. Mat., 397: Reeves, Eccl. Antiqq., 221.



celebrated Mass in, viz. the *saball* [saul] or barn given him by Dicho at Saul, happened to be in this direction : but here there was no choice.\* After this time a few churches were deliberately placed north and south, though not by Patrick : apparently in veneration for the little barn-church at Saul : and sometimes even long afterwards a chapel or small church was called *saball*.

The word *daimhlaig* [dav-leeg, 'stone-house'] was at first applied to any church built of stone : but its use was subsequently confined to an important church. The term *airecol*, or in modern Irish *aircagal*, which meant primarily 'a house of prayer, an oratory,' is a loan-word from the Latin *oraculum* : and we know that in the Latin Lives of those Irish saints who flourished on the Continent, the oratories they founded are often called *oraculum*.† But this term came to signify any small detached house ; and in Irish writings it is often used in this sense. The residential buildings of a monastery, such as the dormitories, small cells for various purposes, the abbot's house, the guest-house, the library, &c., were mostly of wood, after the manner of the houses of the people of the country.

**Nemed or Sanctuary.**—The land belonging to and around a church—the glebe-land—was a sanctuary, and as such was known by the names of *Nemed*, now *neimheadh* [neveh], and *Termann*. *Nemed*, meaning literally 'heavenly' or 'sacred,' is a native word : *Termann*, or as it is usually anglicised, *Termon*, is a loan-word from the Latin *Terminus* : for the sanctuary was generally marked off at the corners by crosses or pillar-stones. Miss Stokes has shown that, in Ireland, the "high-crosses" (which will be noticed at p. 567, below) were used for this purpose :—"That the ancient sanctuaries were marked by high crosses outside the ramparts [of the church or monastery], and that they were under the invocation of certain saints,

\* See Joyce, *Short Hist. of Irel.*, 145.

† Petrie, *Round Towers*, 352 : *Voyage of Bran*, 1., Glossary, 97.

and offered protection to the fugitive who sought shelter under their arms."\* Dr. Petrie ("Round Towers," 59) refers to an ancient canon of the church directing crosses to be erected to mark the limits of the *neimhedh* or sanctuary.



FIG. 94.

High Cross of Dysart O'Dea, County Clare. (From Journ. Roy. Soc. Antiqq., Ireland, for 1894, p. 158. Drawn by Mr. Westropp.) A much finer cross (Monasterboice) will be found figured elsewhere in this book.

It was usual for the founders of churches to plant trees—oftenest yew, but sometimes oak or ash—for ornament and shelter, round the church and cemetery, and generally within the sanctuary. These little plantations were subsequently held in great veneration, and were

\* High Crosses of Castledermot and Durrow, Introd., p. ix.

called *Fidnemed* [finneveh], 'sacred grove,' or grove of the *nemed* or sanctuary : from *fid* (fih), 'a wood or grove.'\* They are often mentioned in the Annals and in the ecclesiastical writings ; and Giraldus Cambrensis notices them in several passages. He relates how a party of Anglo-Norman soldiers, who were stationed at Finglas near Dublin, during the time of Henry II.'s visit to Ireland (in 1171), sacrilegiously cut down the grove of the church, which, as well as the grove itself, was dedicated to St. Canice : for which—as he goes on to say—they all perished in a few days by plague and shipwreck.† The ruins of St. Canice's Church, where this desecration was perpetrated, are still to be seen ; but this structure was erected at a period long after the time of St. Canice, on the site of his primitive church.

The most general term for a church was, and is still, *cill*, *cell*, or *ccall*. Other terms were *eclais* ; *regles* ; *tempull* ; *baisleac* ; *domnach* ; for all of which see p. 316, *supra*.

**Later Churches.**—Until about the period of the Anglo-Norman invasion all the churches, including those in the Romanesque style, were small, because the congregations were small : this, again, chiefly resulted from the tribal organisation, which had a tendency to split up all society, whether lay or ecclesiastical, into small sections. But the territorial system of Church organisation, which tended to large congregations, was introduced about the time of the Invasion. The Anglo-Normans were, as we know, great builders ; and about the middle of the twelfth century the old Irish style of church architecture began, through their influence, to be abandoned. Towards the close of the century, when many of the great English lords had settled in Ireland, they began to indulge their taste for architectural magnificence, and the native Irish chiefs imitated

\* This word *Fidnemed* is very fully discussed by Dr. Petrie, Round Towers, 49–64 : see also FM, A.D. 995.

† Top. Hib., II. liv ; III. x. ; and Hib. Expugn., I. xxxij.



FIG. 95.

Ennis Abbey, Co. Clare. Example of the great abbeys erected after the Anglo-Norman Invasion. Founded by an Irish chief, Donogh Cairbreach O'Brien, in 1240. (From *Kilk. Archaeol. Journ.* for 1889, p. 19.) For another—Kilmallock—founded by an Anglo-Norman, see p. 364, farther on.



and emulated them ; large cruciform churches in the pointed style began to prevail ; and all over the country splendid buildings of every kind sprang up. Then were erected—some by the English, some by the Irish—those stately abbeys and churches of which the ruins are still to be seen ; such as those of Kilmallock (of which see illustration, p. 364, farther on) and Monasteranagh in Limerick ; Jerpoint in Kilkenny ; Grey Abbey in Down ; Bective and Newtown in Meath ; Sligo ; Quin, Corcomroe, and Ennis (fig. 95) in Clare ; Ballintober in Mayo ; Knockmoy in Galway ; Dunbrody in Wexford ; Buttevant ; Cashel ; and many others.

**Round Towers.**—In connexion with many of the ancient churches there were round towers of stone from 60 to 150 feet high, and from 13 to 20 feet in external diameter at the base : the top was conical. The interior was divided into six or seven stories reached by ladders from one to another, and each story was lighted by one window : the top story had usually four windows. The door was placed 10 or more feet from the ground outside, and was reached by a ladder : both doors and windows had sloping jambs like those of the churches. About eighty round towers still remain, of which about twenty are perfect : the rest are more or less imperfect.

Formerly there was much speculation as to the uses of these round towers ; but Dr. George Petrie, after examining the towers themselves, and—with the help of O'Donovan and O'Curry—searching through all the Irish literature within his reach for allusions to them, set the question at rest in his Essay on “ The Origin and Uses of the Round Towers.” It is now known that they are of Christian origin, and that they were always built in connexion with ecclesiastical establishments. They were erected at various times from about the beginning of the ninth to the thirteenth century. They had at least a two-fold use : as belfries, and as keeps to which the inmates of

the monastery retired with their valuables—such as books, shrines, crosiers, relics, and vestments—in case of sudden attack. They were probably used also—when occasion required—as beacons and watch-towers. These are Dr. Petrie's conclusions, except only that he fixed the date of some few in the fifth century, which recent investigations have shown to be too early. It would appear that it was the frequency of the Danish incursions that gave rise to the erection of the round towers, which began to be built



FIG. 96.

Round Tower (perfect) Devenish Island, in Lough Erne, near Enniskillen. (From Kilkenny Archæological Journal. Wakeman.) For another and better view of this tower, with its church, see chap. xxiv., sect. 5, *infra*. Round towers will be found depicted in other parts of this book.

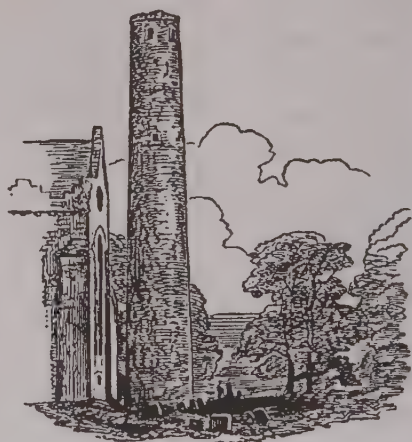


FIG. 97.

Round Tower of St. Canice, Kilkenny; 100 feet high, and perfect, except that it wants the pointed cap. St. Canice was an intimate friend of St. Columkille: but this tower was not erected till some centuries after the death of the two saints.

early in the ninth century simultaneously all over the country. They were admirably suited to the purpose of affording refuge from the sudden murderous raids of the Norsemen: for the inmates could retire with their valuables on a few minutes' warning, with a good supply of large stones to drop on the robbers from the windows; and once they had drawn up the outside ladder and barred the door, the tower was, for a short attack, practically impregnable. Round towers are not quite peculiar to

Ireland: about twenty-two are found elsewhere—in Bavaria, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Scotland, and other countries.

The Irish round towers are called in the native language *cloictheach*, modern form *cloigtheach*, meaning 'bell-house': *cloc*, or *clog*, 'a bell,' and *teach*, 'a house.'\*

**Monastic Lis or Rampart.**—An Irish monastery, including the whole group of monastic buildings, was generally enclosed by a strong rampart, commonly circular or oval, according to the fashion of the country in the lay home-



FIG. 98.

Dominican Abbey, Kilmallock, Co. Limerick (mentioned at p. 362, *supra*). Founded in 1291 by Gilbert Fitzgerald. (From Kilkenny Archaeological Journal, 1879-82, p. 710.)

steads. The rampart was designated by one of the usual Irish names, *rath*, or *lios* [liss], or if of stone, *caiseal* [cashel], and sometimes *cathair* [caher]. We are told in the Tripartite Life that St. Patrick marked out the enclosure of his group of buildings at Armagh with his crosier, "the Staff of Jesus." That this very rampart, or one like it, was retained for many centuries, is proved

\* Some persons have thought that the first syllable in this name might mean a stone (*clock*): so that *cloictheach* might be 'stone-house,' not 'bell-house.' But this is impossible; for the middle *c* of *cloictheach* is never aspirated—it is *c*, not *ch*—as it would be if the word were intended to mean 'stone-house.'

by the fact that the Four Masters notice the "rath of Ardmacha" at the years 1020, 1091, and 1092.

The *vallum monasterii*, "*lios*, or *rath*, or enclosure of the monastery," is mentioned by Adamnan (pp. 24, 143). Within the circumference of the vallum were one or more smaller *lisses*, enclosing individual houses—such as the abbot's residence, the library, the guest-house, &c.—just as we find in the large lay homesteads. For instance, the Four Masters record, at A.D. 918, that there was a great flood in the Shannon, "so that the water reached the *liss* of the abbot of Clonmacnoise."

The actual erection of a monastic *lios* surrounding the whole settlement is recorded in an interesting passage in the Life of St. Carthach, of Lismore, published by the Bollandists at the 14th May. In this we are told that when the saint and his followers, after his expulsion from Rahan, arrived at this place, which had previously been called *Maghsciath* (Ma-skee), the 'plain of the shields,' they began to erect a circular entrenchment. Then a certain virgin, who had a cell in the same field, came up and inquired what they were doing; and St. Carthach answered her that they were preparing to construct a little enclosure or *lios* around their houses and goods for the service of God. And the holy virgin said: "It will not be little, but great." "The holy father, Mochuda [*i.e.* Carthach] "answered: 'Truly it will be as thou sayest, thou hand-maid of Christ; for from this name the place will be "always called in Scotie, *Liass-mór*, or in Latin *Atrium-magnum*,'" *i.e.*, 'great *lios* or enclosure.' It is highly probable that the large fort still called "Lismore," beside the Blackwater, a mile below the present town of Lismore, is the very one erected by Carthach. There are many other records of the erection of these monastic lisses and cashels; and the enclosures of several ancient monasteries, some of earth, some of stone, may still be seen in different parts of the country. The whole group



of buildings, constituting a monastery including the surrounding *lis*, was sometimes called *congbhail* [congwill] and *cathair*, which are native Irish words, and sometimes *mainistir*, which is borrowed from *monasterium*. It often happened that a chief presented his *dun*, or *lios*, to the missionary who converted him, and then the church and other buildings were usually erected within the enclosure : of which Petrie gives many instances.\*

**Wells.**---Wells have at all times been venerated in Ireland by both pagans and Christians ; and we have seen (p. 288) that many of the pagan Irish worshipped wells as gods. Some of these were blessed and consecrated to Christian uses by the early saints, of which a very interesting instance is related in Adamnan's Life of St. Columba (p. 119) :—" Another time, remaining for some " days in the country of the Picts, the holy man [Columba] " heard of a fountain famous amongst this heathen people, " which foolish men, blinded by the devil, worshipped as a " divinity. . . . The pagans, seduced by these things, paid " divine honour to the fountain." Adamnan goes on to say that after Columba had rescued it from heathenism, he blessed it, so that it was ever after revered as a holy well that healed many diseases. In this manner hundreds of the heathen wells were taken over to Christianity and sanctified by the early saints, so that they came to be even more venerated by the Christians than they had been by the pagans.. Yet the heathen practices never quite died out, but have continued to be mixed up with Christian devotions even down to our own day, though now devoid of their original heathen spirit, and quite harmless. The most conspicuous of the existing practices are offerings of various kinds, rags, pins, cups, &c., which may now be seen, as the devotees left them, at almost

\* Round Towers, 445 to 452 : see also Miss Stokes, *Three Months in France*, xxxii. : and Wilde, *Boyne*, 155.

every holy well. This practice prevails still in many parts of Europe, and even in Persia (see fig. 8, p. 9, *supra*).

Those early Irish missionaries did not confine their line of action in this direction to wells: they took over in like manner forts, buildings, festivals, and observances of various kinds, and consecrated them to Christian uses: so that those pagans who became converted had the way



FIG. 99.

Saint Senan's Holy Well, on the west bank of the Shannon, near Doonass, Co. Clare. (Drawn by Petrie.) The offerings here (shown on top of well) consist of wooden bowls, teacups whole or broken, &c. (From Wood-Martin's *Traces of the Elder Faiths*, II. 97; and that from the *Irish Penny Journal*, p. 401.)

made smooth for them, and suffered no violent wrench, so far as external custom was concerned. It is interesting to remark that in adopting this judicious line of action, the Irish missionaries only anticipated the instructions given A.D. 601 by Pope Gregory to the British abbot Mellitus for his guidance under similar circumstances. The Pope's words are: "The temples of the idols in that nation [Britain] ought not to be destroyed; but let the idols that are in them be destroyed; let holy water be

“made and sprinkled in the said temples; let altars be  
 “erected, and relics placed. For if those temples are well  
 “built, it is requisite that they be converted from the  
 “worship of devils to the service of the true God; that  
 “the nation, seeing that their temples are not destroyed,  
 “may remove error from their hearts, and knowing and  
 “adoring the true God, may the more familiarly resort to  
 “places to which they have been accustomed.”\*

Most of the early preachers of the Gospel established their humble foundations—many of them destined to



FIG. 100.

Tobar-cobartha (Tubber-cora), the \*well of help, on the seashore, Inish-murray. If there is a storm, the islanders believe it will be lulled by draining all the water of this well at once into the sea. (From Wood-Martin's *Pagan Ireland*, p. 163, and that from *Kilkenny Archaeol. Journ.* for 1885-6, p. 298. Drawn by Wakeman.)

grow in after-years into great religious and educational institutions—beside fountains, whose waters at the same time supplied the daily wants of the little communities, and served for the baptism of converts. When St. Mochua of Balla went to found a monastery at *Tech Telle*, now Tehelly near Durrow in King's County, he was obliged to give it up, as there was no well in the place. Afterwards when he was about to settle in his final place, Balla in Mayo, his people, in the first instance, by Mochua's directions, looked out for a well, but could find none: till at last a farmer of the place showed them one, in which

\* Bede, *Eccl. Hist.*, I. xxx.: Bohn's Transl.



Mochua decided to remain there.\* In this manner most of our early saints became associated with wells, hundreds of which still retain the names of these holy men, who



FIG. 101.

St. Kieran's Trout Well—a noted station for pilgrims—under a venerable ash-tree of great size, near the ancient church of St. Ciaran or Kieran on the southern bank of the Blackwater, nearly four miles above Kells in Meath. (From Colonel Wood-Martin's *Traces of the Elder Faiths*, II. 110. Drawn by Wakeman.) Another view is given in Wilde's *Boyne and Blackwater*, p. 141. "Within the well"—says Wilde in his account of it—"are several large trouts, each about half a pound weight. They have been there as long as the oldest inhabitant can recollect. These fish are held in the highest veneration by the people."

converted and baptised the pagan multitudes on their margins. The practice began with St. Patrick, as we see by a circumstance related in the Tripartite Life

\* Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, 285.



(p. 93) :—that the saint founded a church at Magh Slecht, in the present County Cavan : “ and there [to this day is revered] Patrick’s Well, in which he baptised many.”

A well is sometimes met with containing one lone inhabitant—a single trout or salmon, which is always to be seen swimming about in its tiny dominion : and sometimes there are two. They are usually tame ; and the people hold them in great respect, and tell many wonderful legends about them. This pretty custom is of old standing, for it originated with the early Irish saints—even with St. Patrick himself. In the Tripartite Life (p. 113) we are told, regarding the well of *Achadh-fobhair*, now Aghagower in Mayo, that “ Patrick left two salmon alive in the well.” The same custom prevailed in the Scottish western islands when Martin visited them in 1703 (p. 141 of his book).

To kill or injure these little fish was considered an outrage bordering on sacrilege : and if they were destroyed by an enemy of the tribe, it was looked upon as an intolerable insult. Even the annalists think it worth while to record an occurrence of this kind. We read in Tigernach :—[A.D. 1061 : *i.e.* during this annalist’s lifetime] “ The O’Connors invaded Munster and demolished the weir “ of Kincora, and they ate up the salmons that lived in the “ well of Kincora.”\* Many holy wells have the reputation of curing diseases : one for blindness, another for headache, another for jaundice, and so on through a great number of ailments.†

\* Rev. Celt., xvii. 402 : see also FM, A.D. 1061.

† As to Holy Wells : see Miss Stokes, Three Months in France, “ Holy Wells ” in Index : Wilde, Boyne, “ Holy Wells,” Index : Stokes, Lives of SS., 360, and “ Wells ” in Index of Matters : Kilk. Archæol. Journ., the several indexes : HyF, 239, note i : Petrie’s article in The Irish Penny Journal, p. 401 : Joyce, Irish Names of Places, i. 449 : Dr. William Stokes, Life of Petrie, 17 : Wood-Martin, Pagan Ireland, chap. v. An interesting book could be written on the Holy Wells of Ireland, provided the writer united an attractive style with sufficient knowledge, and approached his subject in a reverential spirit.

In Cormac's Glossary (p. 7), under the explanation of the word *ána*, 'cups,' sing. *án*, there is an interesting statement about wells, but not in connexion with religion. We are told that in former times it was customary for kings to have small cups, generally of silver, beside wells, for two purposes :—To enable wayfarers to drink, and to test



FIG. 102.

Altar-Stone, about five inches in diameter; one of a group of five, all of which are figured and described by Wakeman in his article on Inishmurry, Kilk. *Archæol. Journ.* for 1885-6, from which this has been copied (p. 241).

if the laws were observed—the inference being that they were if the cups were not stolen. It mentions *Cnoc-Rafann*, now Knockgraffon near Caher, the palace of Fiacha Muillethan, king of Munster in the third century, as one of the places where this custom was kept up.

**Altar-Stone.**—From a very early period it was a general rule of the church that the altar on which Mass was offered

should be of stone. But in case of missionary priests, it was decided that it would be sufficient to have a small altar-flag—duly consecrated—laid upon the altar, of sufficient size to hold a chalice and one or more crosses, while the altar itself might be of wood, or might consist merely of a table or such like.\* St. Patrick himself, as well as every missionary priest after his time, had one of these

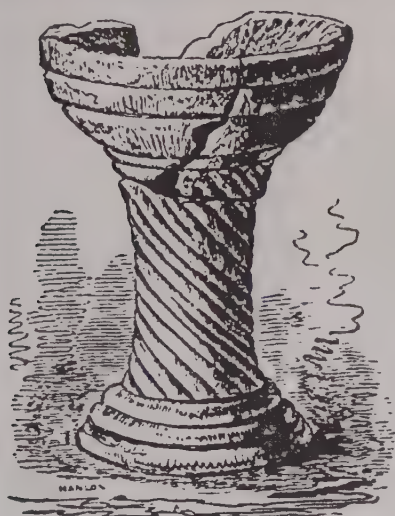


FIG. 103.

Ancient stone Chalice: 7½ inches high: now in National Museum. (From Wilde's Catalogue, p. 132.)

portable altar - flags, which was brought about by a gillie or servant with the other things necessary for the celebration of the Divine mysteries.† The Irish word for an altar-flag was *lecc*, which was, and is, the name for any flat stone. Many of these ancient little altar-*leccs* are still to be seen in museums, of which one is represented on previous page. Along with the altar-stone there is also given here the figure of a stone chalice of a very antique type.

**Bells.**—The Irish for a bell is *cloc*, *clocc*, or *clog*, akin to the English *clock*. The diminutive form *cluccene* [cluckēnē] is used to denote a small bell, called also *lám-chlog* [lauv-clug], 'hand-bell' (see p. 376, *infra*). St. Patrick and his disciples constantly used consecrated bells in their ministrations.‡ How numerous they were in Patrick's time we may understand from the fact, that whenever he left one of his disciples in charge of a church, he gave him a bell: and it is recorded that on the churches of one province alone—Connaught—he bestowed fifty.§

\* Lanigan, iv. 269: Dr. Healy, 142.

† Three Irish Homilies, 81.

‡ Petrie, Round Towers, 382, 383.

§ Trip. Life, 147.

To supply these he had in his household three smiths, whose chief occupation was to make bells. The most ancient Irish bells were quadrangular in shape, with rounded corners, and made of iron : facts which we know both from the ecclesiastical literature, and from the specimens that are still preserved. In the Tripartite Life we are told that a certain bell called *Bethechan*, belonging to St. Patrick, was "a little bell of iron" (*cluccene becc iuirud*).\* An Irish saint named *Lugaid*, or *Moluog*, founded the church of Lismore in Scotland, in the middle of the sixth century. His bell is described in the Breviary of Aberdeen (written in 1509, from some much more ancient authority), as *ferream campanam et quadratam*, 'a quadrangular iron bell':† and this very bell, dating from about A.D. 560, is still preserved and



FIG. 104.

St. Patrick's Bell : called the "Bell of the Will."  
(From Miss Stokes's Inscriptions, II. 112.)

exactly answers the description, attesting the truthfulness of the old record. The little quadrangular bell that belonged to St. Gall, the Irishman who founded the church of St. Gall in Switzerland, about the year 613, remains to this day in the monastery of that city.‡

The bell of St. Patrick, which is more than fourteen hundred years old, is now in the National Museum in Dublin : it is the oldest of all ; and it may be taken as a

\* Tripart. Life, 249.

† Trans. Roy. Ir. Acad., xxvii., p. 7.

‡ Miss Stokes, Early Christian Art, 39.



type of the hammered-iron bells. Its height is  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches : but projecting from the top is a little handle  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inch high, which gives it a total height of  $7\frac{3}{4}$  inches. At the mouth the two dimensions are  $4\frac{7}{8}$  by  $3\frac{7}{8}$  inches. It is made of two iron plates, bent into shape by hammering, and slightly overlapped at the edges for riveting. After the joints had been riveted, the bell was consolidated by the fusion of bronze into the joints and over the surface—probably by dipping into melted bronze—which also increased its resonance. This is the bell known as *Clog-an-udhachta*, or the ‘Bell of the Will’ (so called because it was willed by the saint to one of his disciples), which is much celebrated in the Lives of St. Patrick. A beautiful and costly shrine was made to cover and protect this venerable relic, by order of Donall O’Loughlin, king of Ireland (died 1121) : and this gorgeous piece of ancient Irish art, with O’Loughlin’s name and three others inscribed on it, is also preserved in the National Museum. A beautiful drawing of it by Miss Stokes forms the frontispiece of the second volume of this book. Many others of these venerable iron bronzed bells, belonging to the primitive Irish saints, are preserved in the National and other Museums, several covered with ornamental shrines. Some are called *ceólán*, ‘little musical’ [bell], from *ceól*, music : and some *bernán*, ‘little gapped’ [bell], from *bern*, or *éarn*, ‘a gap,’ on account of a splinter knocked out of the edge : like *Bernán Eimhin*, ‘St. Evin’s little gapped bell.’

About the ninth century the Irish artificers began to make bells wholly of cast bronze. A beautiful quadrangular bell of this class, made some short time before A.D. 900, is to be seen in the National Museum, which tells its own history in an Irish inscription, of which this is a translation :—“A prayer for Cummascach Mac Aillello.” This Cummascach, the son of Ailill, for whom the bell

was made, was house-steward of the monastery of Armagh, and died A.D. 908.\*

The very ancient Irish bells, whether of iron or of bronze, were small, and were sounded by a clapper or tongue. All those in the National Museum are furnished in the inside, at top, with a ring, from which the clapper was hung, and in some the clapper still remains. The interior ring of St. Patrick's bell seems to be modern, no doubt replacing the original one which had worn away.† Occasionally we read of little bells being sounded by striking on the outside: and these probably had no tongues. Concobar's royal jester, Róimid, had, hanging at his side, a melodious little bell, which he often struck with a bronze wand he held in his hand, to procure attention.‡ It appears, too, that the ancient Irish saints sometimes cursed offending chieftains while sounding their bells with the tops of their crosiers,§ but these were obviously the ordinary tongued hand-bells.



FIG. 105.

Mac Ailello's Bell. (From Miss Stokes, *Early Christian Architecture*, p. 83.)

When bells began to be hung on the tops of buildings—

\* See Miss Stokes, *Art*, p. 65; *Inscriptions*, II. 108; and *Early Christian Architecture*, 83.

† That the ancient bells had tongues, see *Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad.*, VIII. 445; Mac Conglinne, 152; *Kilk. Arch. Journ.*, 1852, p. 60; 1862, p. 345; 1868, p. 284, 346; 1872, p. 73.

‡ Mesca Ulad, 35, 37: see also "Róimid" in *Index, infra*.

§ O'Donovan, in *Moyrath*, p. 39, note a.

round towers or other structures—those intended for this use were made large, and the distinction appears in the literature. An ancient Brehon Law Commentary (v. 23) says:—" *Aistreóir* [door-keeper], changeable his work in "ringing the bell and opening the church [two offices "usually combined in one person : see p. 316, *supra*] : high "his work when it is the bell of a *cloictheach* ['bell-house'] : "low his work when it is a *lámchlog* or handbell." This entry shows moreover that the large bell was not rung by pulling at a rope or chain as at present : but the bell-ringer went up and rang it by striking it directly with a hammer or mallet of some kind.

Bells were sometimes put—like that of *Róimid*—to other uses besides ecclesiastical. It was the custom in very early times in Ireland, as it is everywhere at the present day, to suspend little tongued bells from the necks of horses and lapdogs, which kept up a perpetual tinkle. In the story of the *Táin Bo Fraich* (p. 137) we read that the horses of the young prince *Fracch* had each a band of silver round his neck, with a *cluccene óir* or 'little bell of gold' hanging from it. In the "Courtship of Ferb," the horses of the young chief *Mani* had little bells suspended from their necks, which, as they chimed with the horses' tread, made music as sweet as the strings of a harp struck by a master-hand.\* And in the *Vision of Mac Conglinne* (p. 88) a little bell (*clucín*) with a metal tongue is suspended from the *munci* or neckband of a certain horse. So also with lapdogs. In the tale of *Compert Mongain* in LU, we read of a young lady who had a diminutive white lapdog (*mesán*) with a silver chain round its neck, from which hung a little bell of gold (*cluigín óir*).† Bells were also often hung round the necks of cattle, as we shall see in vol. II. p. 282.

The bells used in the church service were generally

\* LL, 253, a, 15 ; Windisch in Ir. Texte, p. 463 : Leahy, p. 5.

† Voyage of Bran, I. 81, 29.

open. But *crotals* or small closed bells, spherical or pear-shaped, were also much in use; they were sounded by a loose little metal ball or pea, and had a small aperture in the side to let out the sound. These were probably sometimes used for horses, dogs, and cattle, as well as on the "Musical Branch" noticed farther on: but on those points there is no certainty

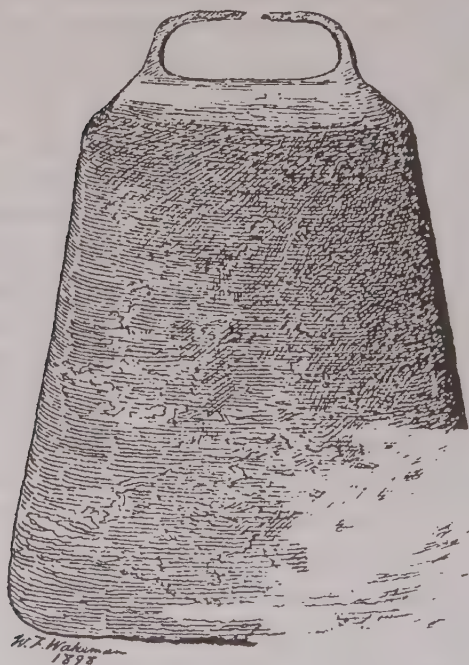


FIG. 106.

Ancient ecclesiastical bell of iron: had a tongue, which is missing. One-quarter real size. Found in a bog at Tybroghan near Mullingar. (From Colonel Wood-Martin's *Traces of the Elder Faiths*, I. 196.)



FIG. 107.

Bronze crotal: one of those found in the ancient workshop at Dooras-Heath (see chapter xxiv., section 5, "Ancient Workshops," *infra*). From Colonel Wood-Martin's *Traces of the Elder Faiths*, I. 196.

Many very small bronze bells—both open and closed—have been found from time to time—one, for instance, in a rath, and another in the bed of a river: \* and a number are to be seen in the National Museum, among which are two

\* *Kilk. Arch. Journ.*, vol. I., p. 260; vol. II. 125.



diminutive open bells, each about one inch in height. These are in all probability specimens of horse- and dog-bells.\* Several of the passages and facts given here, as well as others that might be quoted or referred to, go to show that little bells were used in Ireland in pagan times. On this point, see Stokes's *Life of Petrie*, p. 277.

### *7. Revenues and Means of Support.*

**Fees and Dues.**—The clergy derived their support from several sources. One of the chief of these consisted of dues paid for the performance of various religious functions, in regard to which the Brehon Law lays down the reciprocal obligations of clergy and laity in this manner :—The right of a church from the people is : 1. Tithes ; 2. First Fruits, *i.e.* the first of the gathering of every new produce, and every first calf and every first lamb that is brought forth in the year ; 3. Firstlings, *i.e.* the first son born after marriage [who, accordingly, was to enter religion], and the first-born male of all milk-giving animals. On the other hand, the rights of the people from the clergy were “ baptism, and Communion, and requiem of soul ” : that is to say, spiritual ministration in general.† Fees are not mentioned here : but they were always paid for the performance of religious rites by those who were able to pay ; of which many examples might be cited from ecclesiastical literature.

Certain fixed payments were expected from every householder of the tribe to the abbot of the local monastery, or to the bishop of the tribe. This payment was

\* For further information about bells, see Reeves on Bell of St. Patk., *Trans. Roy. Ir. Acad.*, vol. xxvii. ; Cooke on Ancient Irish Bells, in *Kilk. Arch. Journ.*, 1852-3, p. 47 : 1883-4, p. 126 : Reeves on Eccl. Bells in *Eccl. Antiqq.*, p. 369 : Miss Stokes, *Early Christian Art* (“ Bell ” in Index) : Petrie, *Round Towers* (“ Bell ” and “ Bells ” in Index) : Joyce, *Irish Names of Places*, II. 183 : and Mr. S. F. Milligan's Paper on *Anc. Eccl. Bells in Ulster*, in *Journ. Roy. Soc. Antiqq.*, Ireland, 1903.

† See *Br. Laws*, III. 33, 39.

called *cís* or *cáin* [keece, cawn], *i.e.* rent or tribute ; and the bishop or abbot often collected it by making a *cuaint* [coort], *i.e.* a 'circuit' or visitation through the tribe or district over which he had spiritual jurisdiction. These *cuairts* were the forerunners of the ecclesiastical visitations of the archbishops and bishops of later times.\* They were practised from very early times ; for the eighth-century Irish commentator on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians (i. 20) speaks of a *cuairt parche*, a 'diocesan visitation,' an illustration which, under the circumstances, the writer must have taken from his home in Ireland, for there is no mention of it in the Epistle.†

In the "Tribes and Customs of Hy Many," edited by O'Donovan, is a very interesting statement of the arrangements for church fees and tributes in the ancient territory of Hy Many—the O'Kelly's country—in Galway, as they existed in the fourteenth century ; which we may conclude were handed down with little change from much older times. To the church of Camma, west of the Shannon, near Athlone, which was dedicated to St. Brigit, belonged the baptismal fees of the whole of the O'Kellys ; so that whether the child was brought to that church or to any other to be baptized, or whoever performed the actual baptism, the *comarba* or successor of St. Brigit, *i.e.* the abbess of Camma nunnery and church, "has the power " of collecting the baptismal penny [*pinginn báisdi*] from "these tribes" [the O'Kellys] : of which she kept one-third for her own establishment, and gave the other two-thirds to two churches in the neighbourhood, also dedicated to St. Brigit.

Another church of the district got, in like manner, the *sgreaball ongtha*, the 'screppall of anointing,' *i.e.* administering Extreme Unction. The burial fees belonged to the great monastery of Clonmacnoise, where the chiefs

\* See Reeves, *Colt. Visit.*, Introd., III.

† Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus*, I., p. 632.

of the O'Kellys were buried : and so of other fees. In the same document certain tributes are assigned to churches, irrespective of the performance of any religious rites. For example, the church of St. Grellan received the firstling pig, lamb, and foal, all over Hy Many : a very important addition to the resources of the monastery and church. Many cases of such tributes to other churches, both here and elsewhere through Ireland, might be cited. Sometimes exceptional dues were granted to a church or monastery under special circumstances, or for special spiritual services. In the Life of St. Maignenn, the founder of Kilmainham near Dublin, it is told how that saint once preached a sermon on the Day of Judgment before Dermot, king of Ireland (reigned A.D. 544 to 565), which so powerfully impressed the king that he granted to Maignenn and his successors in the abbotship, for the support of the monastery, "a screpall on every nose\* " [*i.e.* from each head of a household] ; an ounce of gold " for every chieftain's daughter that took a husband, or in " place of that the bride's wedding dress, if the chief's " steward so chose ; and the materials for [the ornamental " parts of] a crosier from the tribute received by the king " from over sea " (Silva Gad., 36).

The mention of the offering of the bride's wedding dress in this record points to another occasional, though important, source of income :—The state dress worn for the first and last time by a king at great ceremonials was, in some cases, handed over to the bishop or abbot who officiated. Thus the horse and robes used by O'Conor, on the occasion of his inauguration as king of Connaught, " became the property of the coarb or successor of St. Dachonna," *i.e.* the abbot for the time being of the monastery of Eas-mac-nEirc, now Assylin near Boyle in Roscommon, who officiated at the ceremony (IarC,

\* The ancient Irish commonly said "per nose" where we say "per head."

139 : but see p. 48, *supra*). Many other examples of the presentation by Irish kings and chiefs of ornamental dresses to ecclesiastics might be cited : and the same practice prevailed, and still to some extent prevails, in England and other countries. These robes were probably taken to pieces and converted into vestments or altar decorations.

**Land.**—The land attached to monasteries, which, as we have seen, was tilled by the monks, formed the staple support of the establishment. The monastic lands were sometimes increased by special grants from kings or chiefs, in addition to that given at the foundation. In the year 645 Dermot (son of Aed Slaine), subsequently king of Ireland, having won a victory which he attributed to the prayers of the monks of Clonmacnoise, made a grant, to the monastery, of the land of *Tuaim nEirc*, now called Lemanaghan, King's County, as *fód-for-altóir*, or 'altar sod' (FM, A.D. 645). Sometimes part of the land belonging to a monastery was let to tenants : and accordingly we find, from the Brehon Law,\* that it was quite usual for monasteries to have both saer-stock and daer-stock tenants, like the lay chiefs (see p. 189, *supra*).

**Tithes.**—In the memorable council held at Kells, under the presidency of Cardinal Paparo, in 1152, it was decreed that tithes should be paid : and again, in the Council of Cashel, held twenty years later, one of the canons was "that all good Christians do pay the tithes of beasts, corn, and other produce to the church of the parish in which they live." But the custom had existed in Ireland, at least nominally, long before this time : for, in several parts of the *Senchus Mór*,† we find it prescribed as a duty to pay tithes, as well as alms and first-fruits to the church. But notwithstanding these decrees, it is certain that tithes

\* Br. Laws, III. 43 : and in several other places in same vol.

† Br. Laws, III. 13, 25, 39 : see also Mac Congl., Pref., x. : and Hy Many, 13.



were not paid very generally or very regularly till after the Anglo-Norman invasion in 1172.

**Voluntary Offerings.**—Besides all the preceding sources of income there were voluntary offerings. Almost all persons who could afford it, when they visited a monastery, left something of value. In early times the offerings, like all other payments, were in ounces of gold and silver, or in kind: and we find a great variety of articles mentioned in the Tripartite Life and other Lives of the Saints:—a caldron, ladies' ornaments, chariot-horses, the grazing of so many cows, rich ornamental dresses, &c.\* The offerings were often large and generous. When King Brian Boru visited Armagh, as he made his royal circuit through Ireland in 1004, he laid an offering of twenty ounces of gold on the great altar, equivalent to £1000 or £1500 of our money.

#### 8. *Various Features of the Ancient Irish Church.*

**Relics and Loricæ.**—It was the custom for the most distinguished of the Irish saints and heads of the great universities to present to their disciples tokens of friendship and esteem, which the disciples reverently preserved by depositing them in churches founded by themselves. This custom is well set forth in a passage in the Irish Life of St. Finnen of Clonard:—"The saints of Ireland came "from every point to learn wisdom with him, so that "there were three thousand saints along with him: and of "them, as the learned know, he chose the twelve high "bishops of Ireland (see p. 322, *supra*). And . . . no one "of these three thousand went from him without a crosier, "or a gospel, or some other well-known token: and round "these reliquaries they built their churches and their "monasteries afterwards." In the Tripartite Life we are told that St. Patrick spent seven years preaching in

\* For example see Book of Fenagh, 79, and note 7. See also p. 380, *supra*.

Connaught, "and he left in the land of Connaught, fifty "bells and fifty chalices, and fifty altar-cloths, each of "them in his church." Many individual examples of this custom might be cited in connexion with St. Patrick and other saints.\* In like manner the stone beds on which the saints slept, and on which they died, were preserved with the utmost veneration : and sometimes churches were built over them. One of the churches in Clonmacnoise enshrining St. Ciaran's stone bed was long known by the name of *Imdaigh Chiarain*, St. Ciaran's bed.

In the Tripartite Life and elsewhere, we often find it stated that St. Patrick wrote an *Aipgitir*, or 'Alphabet' for those disciples whom he left in charge of churches. The Irish phrase is *ro srib aipgitir*, and the Latin equivalent (often found in the Latin memoirs) *scripsit elementa*. This *aipgitir* was a simple compendium—the 'Elements,' as the Latin gives it—of the Christian Doctrine, to be used in teaching the people. A good example of the application of the word appears in the name of a little devotional book attributed to Coeman, or Kevan, the son of *Beogna Airide*, which is called *Aibgitir in Crabaid*, the 'Alphabet of Piety.' The eighth-century Irish Glossator on Paul to the Hebrews, v. 12, explains *Abgitir Crabaithe* as "ruda documenta fidei," i.e. simple or rough-and-ready lessons of the faith.† These little books were preserved with the utmost reverence : but not one of them has survived to our time.

Giraldus Cambrensis notices the reverence paid in Ireland, as well as in Scotland and Wales, to articles that had belonged to saints of the times of old, instancing specially bells and crosiers. He mentions also the custom of swearing on them, and says that the people had much

\* See Stokes's *Lives of SS.*, 226 ; *Trip. Life*, 147 : *Kilk. Archæol. Journ.*, 1872-3, pp. 104-106 : and Dr. Healy, 64.

† Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus*, I. 711. See also *Trip. Life*, xvii. 113, 639 : Dr. Healy, 64 : and Hyde, *Lit. Hist.*, 135 *et seq.*

more regard for oaths sworn on these than on the Gospels. He says also that those who had sworn falsely on them were often chastised severely by some great calamity. His statement about the custom of swearing on relics is fully corroborated by the native records ; a custom which we know prevailed in other countries, and continued to prevail in Ireland to a period within living memory.\*

Articles or relics of any kind that had belonged to the Irish saints were often used as *loricas*, 'protectors' or preservatives against danger of every kind. St. Columkille once presented his cowl (*cochall*) to Aed Mac Ainmirech, king of Ireland, with a promise that as long as he wore it he would not be slain ; and accordingly the king constantly brought it with him on his warlike expeditions. In the year 598, when St. Columkille was dead, Aed marched southwards and encountered Branduff, king of Leinster, at Dunbolg, in Wicklow. Just as the battle was beginning, he ordered his *gilla* or attendant to bring him the cowl. "That cowl," replied the *gilla*, "we have left behind us in the palace of Ailech in the north." "Alas," said the king, "then it is all the more likely I shall be slain by the Leinstermen" : and he was slain, and his army routed by Branduff, in the battle that ensued.†

In like manner the hymns composed by, or in honour of, the ancient saints were used as *loricas* in times of danger : chief among which may be mentioned the *Faed Fiada*, or "deer's cry," which was the hymn St. Patrick and his companions chanted on their way to Tara, Easter Eve, A.D. 433 : and the *Amra Choluimcille*, the Panegyric composed in praise of Columkille during his lifetime by the poet Dallan Forgaill or Eochaid Egeas. Both of these hymns, which are in Irish, are still extant, and have been

\* Giraldus, Top. Hib., II. lii, liii, liv ; and III. xxxiii, xxxiv : see also Silva Gad., 3 : and Hardiman, Ir. Minstr., I. 338. The reader will here be reminded of the oath on the relics extorted by William of Normandy from Harold of England by a trick.

† O'Grady, Silva Gad., 415, 416.

published. The Latin hymn composed by St. Sechnall or Secundinus in honour of Patrick is preserved in the Book of Hymns. The legend is that Patrick promised Sechnall that anyone singing the last three stanzas of it at lying and rising would go to heaven. Fiach's Hymn, in Irish, in honour of Patrick is also a lorica.\*

Several others of those Christian hymns used as "road-safeguards" are preserved in our ancient books. St. Columkille's Irish protecting hymn, which it is said he composed while travelling alone northwards over the hills, after escaping from Tara, where he had been insulted, may be seen in the Irish Miscellany, I. (1846), p. 1. The



FIG. 108.



FIG. 109.

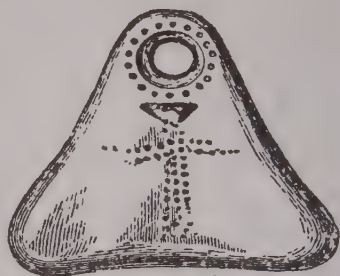


FIG. 110.

Armlets or Loricas, probably Christian. Fig. 108 is half the size of the original, which is covered over with a thin plate of gold, beautifully ornamented: the interior is of lead. Fig. 109 is of gold, full size. Fig. 110 is of stone, full size. All have holes for strings. All are in National Museum. (From Wilde's Catalogue, p. 127: and Gold Part, p. 86.)

ancient Irish introductory notice to this (p. 6) says:—"It will be a protection to any person who will repeat it going on a journey." Sometimes persons setting out on a journey wore a "Gospel," *i.e.* a copy of the whole or part of one of the Four Gospels, folded up tightly in a little case of leather or cloth. When Mac Conglinne was going away from Armagh, his tutor hung a Gospel round his

\* For all these hymns and their use as loricas or protectors, see Trip. Life, 47 to 53; 381; 382 to 401; 402 to 427; and 411, lines 5 and 6: Todd, St. Patrick, 138, 139, 426, 430: Petrie's Tara, 55 to 69: Books of Hymns by Todd, and by Bernard and Atkinson: and Adamnan, 17, note *f*. See also the names of the several hymns and persons in the Index to this book.



neck (p. 10). This pious and pleasing practice has come down to our time. Thomas Moore, in affectionate words, recalls how his mother once, on occasion of his leaving home, hung a Gospel round his neck; and many Roman Catholics now wear a Gospel or scapular round the neck, not only when on a journey but constantly. A "path-protector"—Irish *coimhdhe conáire*, 'protection of the *conáir* or road'—often called *sén-uaire*, the 'blessing of an hour'—was also used in Ireland in pagan times, of which examples will be found in some of the works referred to at bottom.\*

**Sunday.**—The Yellow Book of Lecan and the Lebar Brecc contain copies of a tract called *Cáin Domnaig*, or the 'Law of Sunday,' which it is said was originally brought from Rome in the sixth century by St. Conall of Inishkeel off the coast of Donegal. In this are laid down rules for the observance of the Sunday, which are very strict. It sets forth a long list of works not to be done on Sunday, among which are games of all kinds, buying and selling and compacts in general, the use of the bath, sewing, fishing, boating, grinding corn, cooking, splitting firewood, clearing up the house, Travelling, especially horse-riding, was prohibited, with some necessary exceptions, such as going for a physician for a sick person, going to save a house from fire, or the journey of a priest to attend a sick person who was in danger of

\* Charms or ordinary prayers of all these various kinds, are, according to Mr. Carmichael, still practised in the Highlands and Western Islands of Scotland. Specimens of Christian "road-safeguards," in Gaelic verse, may be seen in his "*Carmina Gadelica*," i. 320, and pp. 325 to 339. Nay, they have preserved the very name *faed fiada* in the forms *fath-fith* and *fith-fath*, which they apply to a charm for rendering a person invisible, or making him appear in the shape of some other animal; just as the original *faed-fiada*, according to the legend, made St. Patrick and his disciples appear as deer, on their way to Tara, fifteen hundred years ago. A description of the Highland *fath-fith*, with a specimen, is given in vol. II., pp. 22 to 25 of the same work. All memory of the *faed-fiada* has been lost in Ireland for centuries. On all this subject, see also Moylena, 37: Rev. Celt., ix. 459: Trip. Life, xiv.: Moyrath, 75: Cambr. Evers., i. 135, note *x*: O'Curry, MS. Mat., 469.

dying before Monday morning. According to the same tract, Sunday was regarded as extending from vespers on Saturday to sunrise on Monday morning: and in this particular it is corroborated by several other authorities.\*

**Easter.**—St. Patrick began the celebration of Easter, A.D. 433, by lighting a great fire on the hill of Slane, on the eve of the festival, which was seen for miles all round: from which we may infer that this custom of lighting a fire in the open was followed generally during and after his time. From very early times there was a difference between the



FIG. XII.

Present ruins of Slane Monastery, erected (long subsequently) on the spot where St. Patrick lighted his first paschal fire. (From Wilde's *Boyne and Blackwater*, p. 178.)

East and the West as to the mode of calculating the time for Easter, so that it often happened that it was celebrated at different times at Rome and at Alexandria. The Roman method of computation, which was subsequently found not to be quite correct, was brought to Ireland by St. Patrick in 432, and was carried to Britain and Scotland by the Irish missionaries. Many years after St. Patrick's arrival in Ireland, Pope Hilary caused a more correct method to be adopted at Rome, which it was intended should be followed by all other Christian

\* O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, i. 32: O'Looney, in *Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad.*, MSS. Series, p. 195: LB, 204, b, 34.

countries. But from the difficulty of communicating with Rome in those disturbed times—or as Bede (*Eccl. Hist.*, III. iv) expresses it “on account of their being so remote from the rest of the world”—the Christians of Great Britain and Ireland knew nothing of this reformation, and continued to follow their own old custom as handed down to them from the great and venerated apostles St. Patrick, St. Columba, and others, which they steadfastly refused to change notwithstanding the exhortations of St. Augustine and his successors in Canterbury. Irish monks including the great missionary St. Columbanus—then in France—maintained their side with learning and spirit: but the adherents of the old custom grew fewer year by year. The monks of Iona were the last to yield, which they did about the year 716, and thus terminated a dispute that had lasted more than a century and a half, and which, though the question was comparatively unimportant, had given rise to more earnest controversy than any other during the early ages of the church in these countries.\*

**Bishops.**—As the episcopate was not limited, and more especially as the dioceses were not territorially defined, bishops were much more numerous in those early times than subsequently. This was the case from the very first introduction of Christianity into Ireland. Nennius tells us that St. Patrick consecrated 365 bishops: and the First Order of Saints, including St. Patrick himself, was said to have consisted of 350 bishops. Both statements are probably exaggerated: but even so, they sufficiently indicate the general tendency. But it appears that this practice of consecrating a bishop without a diocese also existed in early ages on the continent, though it prevailed

\* For fuller accounts of this celebrated dispute, see Dr. Healy, pp. 527–531: Reeves, *Adamn.* Index, “Easter”: and Joyce, *Short Hist. of Irl.*, 160. The time of celebrating Easter is learnedly discussed by the Rev. Dr. B. Mac Carthy in his “Introduction” in vol. iv. of the *Annals of Ulster*.

to a greater extent and for a longer time in Ireland than elsewhere.\*

**Comorba or Coarb.**—The Irish word *comorba*, commonly Englished *coarb*, means an heir or successor in general : from the Irish prefix *com* (equal to the English *co* or *con*), and *orba*, land or any inheritance. In connexion with a church, this word *comorba* or *coarb* was usually applied to the inheritor of a bishopric, abbacy, or other ecclesiastical dignity. Thus the archbishop of Armagh is the *coarb* of St. Patrick ; the archbishop of Dublin the *coarb* of St. Laurence O'Toole ; the abbot of Glendalough was the *coarb* of St. Kevin ; and the pope is often called the *coarb* of St. Peter.

**Erenach.**—The lands belonging to a church or monastery were usually managed by an officer called an *erenach* or *herenach* (Irish *airchinnech*), who, after deducting his own stipend, gave up the residue for the purposes intended—the support of the church or the relief of the poor. It was generally understood to be the duty of the *erenach* to keep the church clean and in proper repair, and the grounds in order. There were *erenachs* in connexion with nearly all the monasteries and churches ; mostly laymen. The lay *erenachs* were usually tonsured.† This word *airchinnech*, like *comorba*, was originally a lay term, applied to a chief or leader : in Zeuss, 868, 34, it glosses *princeps* : and in Cormac's Glossary it is correctly derived from *air*, 'over,' or 'noble,' and *cenn*, a 'head.'‡

**Tonsure.**—The tonsure introduced by St. Patrick, and used by the First Order of Saints, was *ab aure ad aurem*, i.e. the hair was cut off the whole front of the head from ear to ear, while the back part was left untouched, and flowed down long : which fashion was also adopted by St.

\* Lanigan, iv. 35 · Reeves, Eccl. Antiqq., p. 123, note A.

† Br. Laws, v. 123, 13.

‡ See Ussher's Essay on "Corbes, Herenaches, and Termon Lands" : Works by Elrington, xi. 421. It will be seen from the above that those are wrong who say that *airchennach* is a corruption of *archidiaconus*.



Columkille and by the Second Order of Saints in general. This we learn from several authorities, among them the Catalogue mentioned at page 317, *supra*, which says that the First and Second Orders of Irish Saints had "one tonsure from ear to ear": but that those of the Third Order had a variety of tonsures. Many attempts were made to induce the early Irish ecclesiastics to change their custom for the *tonsura corona*, or 'coronal tonsure,' also called "Saint Peter's," in which the hair was cut only from a circular space on the crown of the head. It was alleged as a reproach against the Irish that they had the tonsure of Simon Magus; but they held on to the custom taught them by their venerated apostles, as they retained their own time of celebrating Easter: and although Adamnan wished to introduce the coronal tonsure to Iona, the monks refused to make a change.\* At length, in 718, according to Tigernach's Annals—two years after the adoption of the Roman time of celebrating Easter—and fifteen after the death of Adamnan—the Roman tonsure was adopted in Iona: by which time, it is to be presumed, the tonsure from ear to ear had been abandoned everywhere in Ireland. (For Druidic tonsure, see p. 233, *supra*.)

**Cros-Figill.**—Sometimes people prayed while holding the arms extended in front, so as to form a cross. This was so well recognised a practice that it had a special name, *Cros-figill*. The word *figill*, which is the Latin *vigil*, is commonly used in Irish in the sense of prayer: so that *cros-figill* means 'cross-prayer.' O'Clery, in his Glossary, defines it as "a prayer or vigil which one makes on his knees with his hands stretched out in [the form of] a cross." In the Irish Life of St. Fechin, it is stated that Moses routed the Amalekites by praying with his hands extended in *cros-figill*. This practice is mentioned everywhere in the old ecclesiastical literature; and how early it

\* See Bede, Eccl. Hist., v. xxi.

began we may see from an Irish writer's remark on one of the Psalms in the Milan Glosses—eighth century—that in prayer, the eyes speak to God by being raised up to Him, the knees and legs by kneeling, the body by prostration, and the hands by *cross-figill*.\*

**Aentaid or Union.**—The ancient Irish saints were in the habit of making a Union (Irish *aentaid*, pron. aintee) with each other as a mark of close friendship and affection. This union is very often mentioned in the Lives of the Saints, but what it consisted in is not clear. No doubt it was a spiritual union of some kind: probably a solemn engagement that each should pray or celebrate Mass for the other or others at certain appointed times. When a saint had great reputation for holiness, many others of less eminence sought to bring about a “union” with him.

**Kings retiring to Monasteries.**—No circumstance is more indicative of the wide-spread, deep religious feeling among the ancient Irish people than the number of kings who late in life abdicated, and either retired to monasteries, or went on pilgrimage, generally to Rome (see p. 341, *supra*). The practice began early, and became very general: of which there are so many records all over our literature, especially the annals, that it is unnecessary to refer to individual instances.

### 9. Popular Religious Ideas.

**Hell.**—The popular notions on various religious points as reflected in the tales and in the legends of the saints, are many of them very curious; but they are not of course given here as the settled doctrines emanating from any ecclesiastical authority.

Hell was deep under the earth, and is represented in some passages as fiery hot: in others as intolerably cold: and often both, *i.e.* hot in one part and cold in another:

\* Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus*, I., p. 468.

reminding one of Milton's description of the damned as passing "o'er many a frozen, many a fiery Alp." In the "Demon Chariot of Cuculainn" (p. 375), a tale in the book of the Dun Cow, the gate of hell is opened to let out Cuculainn, and there was instantly a furious wind-rush outwards; when, says Laegaire, "I saw the cold, piercing wind like a double-edged spear: little that it swept not our hair from our heads, and that it went not through us to the earth." But another part was of a different temperature; for Cuculainn, relating (p. 391) how he was brought to hell, says:—"My body was scarred, and demons carried off my soul into the red-hot charcoal." In an Irish poem of equal antiquity, quoted by Stokes,\* a person prays to be saved from "frozen hell" (*iffernn sectha*): and another ancient poem quoted by one of the scholiasts on the Amra, has the expression "the chilly abode of hell."† A much later document, a fourteenth-century poem in the Book of Fenagh (p. 103), says of certain bad persons, "Their dark fast abode shall be the cold flagged floor of lowermost hell": but a few lines farther on in the same poem, it is said that other persons, "for the evils they have done, shall be put into hell fire." In a still later poem Oisín asks St. Patrick how is it possible that Finn, the ever generous, should now have cold hell for his house.‡ A poem in the Irish Life of St. Brendan states that anyone buried in Tuam-da-ghualann shall not "suffer the torments of cold hell" (*ithfern uar*).§

There are many detailed descriptions of hell in old Irish writings, of which the following items from a sermon on the Day of Judgment in the Book of the Dun Cow|| may be taken as a sample:—"A merciless seat of dark fires ever burning, of glowing coals, of smothering fogs, in presence of the king of evil in the valley of tortures; life all woeful, sad, foul, unclean; numerous gluttonous

\* Rev. Celt., viii. 355. † *Ibid.*, xx. 179. ‡ Hyde, Lit. Hist., 504.

§ Stokes, Lives of SS., i. 3504: Brendaniana, 21, 11.

|| Translated by Stokes, Rev. Celt., iv. 247.

“ long-clawed dogs [worrying the damned] ; cats tearing  
“ and furrowing the flesh ; fiends torturing ; fierce rending  
“ lions ; toads and poisonous adders ; hideous iron birds  
“ with long talons ; stinking stormy loughs, cold and  
“ hellish ; red-hot flags under the feet ; strangling of  
“ throats and torturing of heads ; existence in hunger and  
“ thirst, in great heat, in great cold, in company of the  
“ fiends and of the household of hell ; wailing, groaning,  
“ screaming.” Another description, at least equally  
dismal, has been left us by St. Brendan, who got a peep  
into hell, through the gate, by the civility of the best  
possible guide—the devil.\*

The punishment in hell had often some relation to the  
crime, and sometimes the very instruments followed the  
wretch to hell, and were now turned to his own punish-  
ment. The sons of O’Corra saw a man digging in a  
garden on one of the islands of hell, while both spade and  
handle were red-hot : which punishment he was doomed  
to because while on earth he worked every Sunday digging  
in his garden.†

In some cases the damned were freed from their  
tortures every Sunday, or their punishment was miti-  
gated : a notion found also in ancient Welsh and other  
ecclesiastical legends. The sons of O’Corra hear a number  
of birds singing on a Sunday ; and are informed that  
“ these are the souls that are permitted to come out of  
hell every Sunday.”‡ The same idea is found in the  
Vision of Adamnan. Even in the case of Judas, he was  
permitted to come to a place on Sundays where his  
sufferings were lightened. On one of these days St.  
Brendan saw him sitting on a rugged and slimy rock,  
over which the waves dashed alternately from east and

\* Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, 254. The reader may compare these with Milton’s descriptions of hell in the opening and towards the end of the second book of *Paradise Lost*.

† Joyce, *Old Celtic Romances*, 418.

‡ *Ibid.*, 416.



west and drenched him : the waves from the east were of fire, and those from the west were icy cold.\* We may imagine his condition on week-days.

The devil could take a variety of shapes as it suited his purpose : but when in his own natural form and character, the legends represent him much as he appears in the popular notions of the present day. He once paid a visit in disguise to St. Molling, who soon discovered who he was, and recommended him to go on his knees and pray :—" Ah," said he, " I am not able to kneel down, for my knees are at the back of my legs."† A legend in the Irish Life of St. Brigit relates that the devil once ventured into the refectory where the saint and her nuns were at dinner. But Brigit miraculously rendered him visible ; when he appeared beside the table " with his head down " and his feet up, while smoke and flames issued from his " gullet and nostrils "—to the great terror of those nuns who saw him (Stokes, *Lives*, 190).

**Four Visits after Death.**—We are told in a legend in the Second Vision of Adamnan, that the soul, on parting from the body, visits four places before setting out for its final destination—the place of its birth, the place of its death, the place of its baptism, and the place of its burial.‡ According to this, the pathetic wish of the poor old Irish-woman who recently lay dying in Liverpool was granted. Just with her last breath she begged to know from the Irish priest who shrived her whether God would permit her to pass through Ireland on her way to heaven.

**Spirits in the Shape of Birds.**—Human souls, as well as angels and demons, often took the shape of birds : those of the good were white and beautiful ; while wicked

\* *Brendaniana*, 162, 243.

† *Feilire*, 105. Notwithstanding this ludicrous expression, there is something pathetic in Satan's replies during this interview, betraying in the heart of the good old monk who wrote the account a lurking feeling of commiseration like that exhibited in the last verse of Burns's " Address to the Deil."

‡ Stokes, *Rev. Celt.*, XII. 425.

souls and demons often appeared as ravens or other sooty-looking birds of ill omen.\*

**Ceuturies appear as hours.**—A very common ecclesiastical legend is this:—A man, generally a monk, walks out into the woods. Suddenly he hears a bird singing with heavenly sweetness over his head in a tree. He sits or lies down and listens entranced, forgetful of everything for the time. At last when he has remained for perhaps



FIG. 112.

Mellifont Abbey near Drogheda, as it appeared in 1791. Founded in 1142 by Donogh O'Carroll, king of Oriell. The first Cistercian monastery founded in Ireland. (From Grose's Antiquities.)

three hours, as he deems it, the bird ceases and flies away, and he returns to the monastery. But there he is amazed to find strangers everywhere, and all things changed. Finally, it is discovered that he has been away listening to the music for 300 years. Then seeing the real state of things, he receives the last sacraments, dies, and goes to heaven. Similar legends, as we have seen (p. 297, *supra*), existed among the Irish pagans, and indeed are found in the ancient popular literature of other countries.†

\* For instances, see Joyce, *Old Celtic Romances*. 144, 405, 416, 419.

† For an instance, see Feilire. 107, and O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, II. 386.



FIG. 113.

Ornament, with Inscription, on the cover of the "Misach," an ancient reliquary belonging to Inishowen. From M<sup>r</sup>s Stokes's "Christiana Inscriptions," II. 102.

## CHAPTER XI

### LEARNING AND EDUCATION

#### SECTION I. *Learning in Pagan Times.*

##### *Ogham.*



ANY passages in our old native literature, both sacred and profane, state that the pagan Irish had books before the introduction of Christianity. In the memoir of St. Patrick, written by Muirchu Maccu Machteni in the seventh century, now contained in the Book of Armagh, he relates how, during the contest of the saint with the druids at Tara, King Laegaire [Laery] proposed that one of Patrick's books and one belonging to the druids should be thrown into water, to see which would come out uninjured: a sort of ordeal (p. 307, *supra*). Here it will be observed that Muirchu's statement that the druids had books embodies a tradition that was ancient in the seventh century, when he wrote: and it derives additional force from the fact that it is brought in incidentally (see p. 10, *supra*). The same story is told in the Tripartite Life.

The lay traditions, many of them as old as Muirchu's Life, which are found everywhere in the Historical and Romantic Tales, and in other documents, state that the pagan Irish used Ogham writing: and we find Ogham inscriptions constantly referred to as engraved on the tombs of pagan kings and chiefs, each usually containing

merely the name of the person buried, but often also his father's name, and occasionally one or two other circumstances very briefly stated.\* A typical example occurs in the Book of the Dun Cow, where *Cáilte* [Keelta] gives an account of the death and burial of Ochy Airgthech (a temporary usurping king of Ireland—third century), ending with this expression:—"And by his tomb there is a pillar-stone: and on the end of the pillar that is in the earth there is an *ogom*: this is what it says:—" 'Eochaid Airgthech here: Cáilte slew me in an encounter against Finn.' "† Whenever the death and burial of a person is recorded in the old tales, whether relating to pagan or Christian times, there is almost always a statement like the above:—that a stone was placed over the grave, on which the name was inscribed in Ogham.

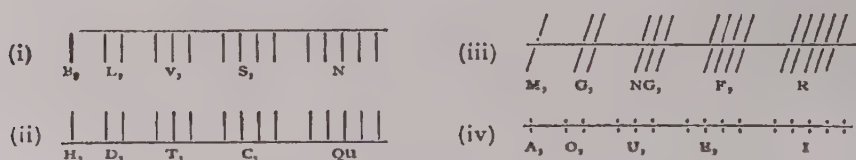


FIG. 114.

Ogham Alphabet. (From Journ. Roy. Soc. Antiqq. Ire. for 1902, p. 3.) There were a few other characters which were occasionally used.

Ogham was a species of writing, the letters of which were formed by combinations of short lines and points, on and at both sides of a middle or stem line called a *flesc*. Scraps of Ogham are sometimes found in manuscripts. Sir James Ware (Antiqq. 19) says he had an old vellum book filled with Ogham characters. But so far as we can judge from the specimens remaining to us, its use was mostly confined to stone inscriptions, the groups of lines and points generally running along two adjacent sides of the stone, with the angle for a *flesc*. In the ancient tales we find it often stated that Oghams were also cut on rods of

\* O'Donovan, Gram., Pref. xlv, xlv.

† Voyage of Bran. i. 48, 52: O'Donovan, Gram., xlv: LU, 134, a a.



yew or oak.\* According to the Brehon Law Books, pillar-stones with Ogham inscriptions were sometimes set up to mark the boundaries between two adjacent properties; and these were often covered up with mounds of earth. But nearly all the Oghams hitherto found are sepulchral inscriptions; which answer exactly to the descriptions given in the old records; as they contain little more than the names of the persons interred and of their fathers. The Ogham alphabet is called the Beth-luis-nion, from the names of the three first letters, representing B, L, N. The letters are nearly all named from trees: hence they are called collectively *feada* [faa], or 'woods': and what is very remarkable, the order of the letters is totally different from that of the Latin or any other alphabet.†

Between two and three hundred Ogham monuments have been found in various parts of the four provinces of Ireland; but they are far more numerous in the south and south-west than elsewhere. Most of them stand in their original situations; but many have been brought to Dublin, where they may be seen in the National Museum; and a few have been sent to the British Museum. About fifty have been found in Wales, England, Scotland, and the Isle of Man; but more in South Wales and Scotland than elsewhere‡: all probably inscribed by or under the influence of Irishmen.

In the Book of Ballymote is an ancient treatise on Ogham, which there is reason to believe was originally written in the beginning of the ninth century, and copied into this book from some older volume; and there is a second and less important treatise in another Irish manuscript. These tracts give a key to the reading of Ogham,

\* LI., 58, a, 41; 59, 74; Miss Hull, Cuch. Saga, 128: Sull., Introd., 343, note 575.

† Ogygia, III. xxx.

‡ See Rhys, Paper in Journ. Roy. Soc. Antiqq. Irel., 1902, p. 1:

Independently of them, the key has been got from bilingual stone-inscriptions—one at least in Ireland and several in Wales—in which the same words and names are given in both Ogham and Latin letters—something like the Rosetta stone.\* The key thus found corresponds with that given in the manuscripts. Where inscriptions have not been injured or defaced, they can in general be deciphered, so that many have been made out beyond all question. But as the greatest number of Ogham stones are more or less worn or chipped or broken, there is in the interpretation of the majority of the inscriptions some conjecture and uncertainty.



FIG. 115.

The bilingual stone in Killeen Cormac. See p. 314, *supra*, and the references given in note †, p. 315. (From *Loca Patriciana*, p. 41.) Mr. Macalister doubts that this is a bilingual, and interprets both inscriptions differently from Father Shearnan. *Studies in Irish Epigraphy*, Part I., p. 78.

As to the antiquity of Ogham writing, some contend that all Oghams are purely pagan, dating from a time before the introduction of Christianity; and they will not admit the correctness of any reading that brings an inscription within Christian times. The late Bishop Graves of Limerick, a most eminent scholar, endeavoured to prove, on the other hand, that they are all purely Christian. Others again, while admitting the use of Ogham in Christian times, maintain that this writing is

\* Sull. *Introd.*, 67: *Kilk. Arch. Journ.*, 1860-2, pp. 229, 303; 1862-3, p. 206.

a survival from the far distant ages of paganism, and that it was developed before Christianity was heard of in Ireland. There are the best reasons for believing that this opinion is correct; and to support it we have the universal agreement of the old MS. traditions, with still stronger linguistic evidence. Ogham inscriptions contain numerous forms of the Irish language which are identical with those in Gaulish inscriptions older than the fifth

century—forms which had fallen out of use in the Irish branch of Celtic ages before the earliest of the Irish Glosses were written, though many of these date from the seventh or eighth century. These considerations—linguistic and historical—have led Dr. Whitley Stokes to the conclusion “that some of the Celts of these “islands wrote their language before “the fifth century, the time at which “Christianity is supposed to have “been introduced into Ireland. With “this conclusion Cormac Mac Cul- “lenan’s statements agree.”\* (For Cormac see below.) On this point also the Rev. Dr. B. Mac Carthy truly remarks:—“In substance the “same as the present language, the “Ogham script belongs to a stage “centuries older than that to which



FIG. 116.

Ogham stone. From Kilk. Arch. Journal, in which great numbers of these stones are pictured and described.

“according to the progress of linguistic development, “the most archaic of our other literary remains can be “assigned.” This fact alone, according to Dr. Mac Carthy, is sufficient to prove “that the Irish possessed letters before the introduction of Christianity.”†

\* Stokes, *Three Irish Glossaries*, lv, lvi: see also Hyde, *Lit. Hist.*, 110, and note 1.

† *Codex. Pal.-Vat.*, 244.

The necessary conclusion from all this is that Ogham stones, containing such archaic forms of the language, were engraved and erected by the pagan Irish long before the advent of St. Patrick. Zeuss, who saw Ogham only in books, even with his imperfect sources of information, came to the same conclusion. He found fragments of Ogham among the glosses of the St. Gall copy of Priscian (glosses written in the seventh or eighth century), and was profoundly impressed with their great antiquity; so that elsewhere he states his opinion that the Celtic people wrote in Ogham before they received the Latin letters from the Romans. On this, Stokes (having stated his conclusion that some of the Celts of these islands wrote their language before the fifth century) says:—"It is with 'sincere pleasure that I put these notes together [in "' Three Irish Glossaries,' pp. lv and lvi], as justifying 'the idea thrown out by Zeuss in his preface.'"

Let us now see what the written records have to say. In Cormac's Glossary (p. 75)—compiled in the ninth or tenth century, but embodying records and traditions centuries older—it is stated that the heathen Irish kept in their cemeteries a rod called *fé*, for measuring bodies and graves, on which Ogham was inscribed: and that they were accustomed to mark with Ogham everything that was odious to them [like the *fé*]. Elsewhere (p. 130) he states that a person named Lomna cut an Ogham on a four square rod for Finn to give him certain information. Besides this we find everywhere in the Tales—many of them so old as to be quite pagan in character—statements that Ogham was used from the most remote times as a mode of communication between individuals, and, as already remarked, that the names of persons interred were often engraved on their tombstones.

There are many other considerations all tending to show that there was some form of written literature before the advent of Christianity. Our oldest records testify to



the existence of a long succession of poets and historians from the earliest times: and several circumstances indicate a state of literary activity at the time of the arrival of St. Patrick. Both the native bardic literature and the ancient Lives of Patrick himself and of his contemporary saints concur in stating that he found in the country literary and professional men—all pagans—druids, poets, and antiquarians, and an elaborate code of laws. And it is certain that immediately after the general establishment of Christianity, in the fifth century, the Irish committed to writing in their native language “not only the laws, “bardic historical poems, &c., of their own time, but those “which had been preserved from times preceding, whether “traditionally or otherwise.”\* The use of writing could hardly have come into general use so suddenly without a pretty widespread previous knowledge of letters. To take another view of the case. The earliest of the glosses published by Zeuss, which he states were written in the eighth century, but, according to other scholars, in the seventh, show that at that period Irish as a written language was fully developed and cultivated, with a polished phraseology and an elaborate systematic grammar, and having fixed and well-established *written* forms for its words, and for all their rich inflections. It is hardly conceivable how such a regular and complete system of written language could have been developed in the period that elapsed from the fifth century to the general spread of Christian learning—a period which will appear much too short when we recollect that early Irish secular literature had its roots, not in Christianity, but in native learning, which was the main, and almost the sole, influence in developing it.

Again: Irish poetry was developed altogether in the lay schools. It had, as will be mentioned (see vol. II. pp. 497 and 498), a very complicated prosody, with numerous

\* Petrie's Tara, 38.

technical terms—fifty or more—all native Irish, some of which may be seen in the article on Prosody in O'Donovan's grammar. It exhibits no trace of Latin or ecclesiastical influence, though the Christian Irish writers continued to use it when writing in the native language. All this shows that Irish prosodial rules and technical terms, and of course Irish poetry in general, were brought to their state of completeness before the introduction of Christianity. If the prosodial system had grown up under the influence or during the prevalence of Christian learning, it would certainly have a mixture of Latin terms, like Christianity.. So also with the lay scholastic nomenclature (p. 430, *infra*)..

The last witness to be brought forward is a foreigner, whose testimony is direct and decisive, and quite sufficient of itself to set at rest the question of the existence of writing among the pagan Irish, though it has hitherto been scarcely noticed by writers on ancient Ireland. A Christian philosopher of the fourth century of our era\* named "Aethicus or Ethicus of Istria," well known in ancient literature, wrote a *Cosmography of the World* ("*Cosmographia Aethici Istrii*"), of which many editions have been published. One part of it has been inserted by Orosius (about A.D. 420) in his "*History*," of which it forms the second chapter of the first book. Ethicus travelled through the three Continents and described what he saw, in an *Itinerary*, of which a sort of descriptive summary was made soon after his time by a priest named Hieronymus or Jerome. This abridgment, which was published at Leipsic by Wuttke in 1854, is a well-known work: and it is the edition referred to and quoted here..

From Spain Ethicus came direct to Ireland, whence he crossed over to Britain, and thence to the Orkney Islands. He was something of a pedant, with a high opinion of his own learning, eccentric, fond of philosophic

\* Some place him as early as the second or third century; but he could not have been later than the fourth

puzzles, hard to please, and very censorious: and he deliberately adopted an obscure and often a corrupt Latin phraseology, merely to puzzle his readers. While in Spain he propounded some knotty questions to the philosophers there, who, he says, were not able to answer them. In a few very obscure sentences he seems to commend the Britons for their natural abilities and for their skill in mining and metallic arts: but, almost in the same breath, he says they were so unlearned [in book knowledge?] as to be quite a horror (*imperitissimam gentem, horrorem nimium*). All the rest of what he has to say about Britain is devoted to minerals, which were found there in great abundance.

The words about Ireland, in the passage bearing on our present subject, are however perfectly plain (p. 14, Leipsic Ed.) :—Leaving Spain

“Hiberniam properavit et in ea aliquandiu commoratus est eorum volumina volvens. Appellavitque eos ideomochos, vel ideo histas, id est, imperitos laboratores vel incultos doctores.”

“He hastened to Ireland and remained there some time examining their volumes: and he called them [*i.e.* the Irish sages] *ideomochos* or *ideo-histas*, that is to say, unskilled toilers or uncultivated teachers.”\*

The rest of the short passage about Ireland is corrupt and obscure, consisting of a general grumble about the labour he underwent in coming hither and the small reward he had for his trouble; and it does not concern us here. It will be observed that he hits off what he obviously considered the main characteristics of the two countries—Ireland for books, Britain for minerals. But

\* The writer of the article on Ethicus in the *Nouvelle Biographie Générale* renders the first sentence :—“Il part pour l’Hibernie, ou il reste quelque temps à examiner les livres des sages irlandais.” This writer thinks—erroneously, as I believe—that the Jerome above mentioned, who made an abstract of the *Cosmography*, was the great Christian father St Jerome.

the fact that he does not mention books in connexion with the people of Britain does not imply that there were none. The Britons had books, but of the ordinary type common among Christians at that time all over the Roman empire, consisting chiefly of ecclesiastical literature in the Latin language : so that there was nothing in them specially requiring notice from him, or more probably those people he happened to come across had no books.

But in Ireland the case was different. Here he found native Irish books, of which both the language and the literature were quite new and strange to him. If there were any Christians in the country at the time—and it is pretty certain there were—their books were few and of the same general character as those in Britain—totally different from the native books. Ethicus speaks of the *volumina* of the Irish as a noteworthy feature of the country : and as to his depreciatory tone, we need not be surprised at that ; for besides his natural fault-finding bent of mind, we know that all learning outside that of Rome and Greece was in those times looked upon as barbarous and almost beneath notice. In a similar strain he speaks slightly of the Spanish sages. Moreover he could not understand the Irish language, and never got to the bottom of the native learning, such as it was. But his opening statement proves that when he visited—which was at least a century before the time of St. Patrick—he found books among the Irish ; and it implies that he found them in abundance, for he remained some time examining them. The fact that there were numerous books in Ireland in the fourth century implies a knowledge of writing for a long time previously. Mr. James Fergusson, a cool-headed English investigator, thinks that the Irish had books in the time of Cormac Mac Art (A.D. 254–277)\* and he came to this conclusion on the strength of Irish records alone, knowing nothing of Ethicus.

\* Fergusson, *Rude Stone Monuments*, p. 196.



From all that precedes we may take it as certain :—

1. That native learning was actively cultivated and systematically developed in Ireland before the introduction of Christianity : and

2. That the pagan Irish had a knowledge of letters, and that they wrote their lore, or part of it, in books, and cut Ogham inscriptions on stone and wood. But when or how they obtained their knowledge of writing, we have as yet no means of determining with certainty.

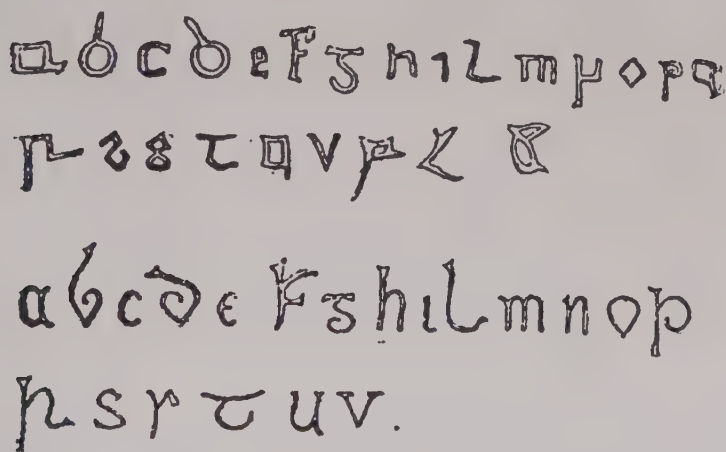


FIG. 117.

Two Irish Alphabets : the upper one of the seventh century : the lower of the eleventh. The three last characters of the first alphabet are Y, Z, and &c. (Two forms of s in each.) (From Miss Stokes's *Christian inscriptions*, II. 135.)

It is true indeed that no books or writings of any kind, either pagan or Christian, of the time before St. Patrick, remain—with the exception of Ogham inscriptions. But this proves nothing ; for in this respect Ireland is circumstanced like most other countries. A similar state of things exists, for instance, in Britain, where, notwithstanding that writing was generally known and practised from the Roman occupation down, no manuscript has been preserved of an earlier date than the eighth century.

On this question the authority of Edmund Spenser the poet cannot be considered of much value : but it is worth while to quote his words as representing the convictions of thoughtful men of his time—the sixteenth century—regarding the ancient civilisation of Ireland.

“ It is certaine that Ireland hath had the use of letters very aunciently, and long before England. Whence they had those letters it is hard to say : for whether they at their first comming into the land, or afterwards by trading with other nations which had letters, learned them of them, or devised them among themselves, is very doubtful ; but that they had letters aunciently, is nothing doubtfull, for the Saxons of England are said to have their letters, and learning, and learned them from the Irish, and that also appeareth by the likenesse of the character, for the Saxon character is the same with the Irish.”

He goes on to say :—

“ It seemeth that they [the Irish] had them [the letters] from the nation that came out of Spaine.” (View, 65.)

Spenser here mixes up the original letters of the pagan Irish with those brought over by St. Patrick and his fellow-missionaries : but the passage is none the less instructive for that.

There is nothing, either in the memoirs of St. Patrick, or in Irish secular literature, or in Jerome's abridgment of Ethicus, giving the least hint as to the characters or the sort of writing used in the books of the pagan Irish. But whatever characters they may have used in times of paganism, they adopted the Roman letters in writing their own language after the time of St. Patrick : which are still retained in modern Irish. These same letters, moreover, were brought to Great Britain by the early Irish missionaries already spoken of (p. 336, *supra*), from whom the Anglo-Saxons learned them (as Spenser says above) : so that England received her first knowledge of letters—as she received most of her Christianity—from Ireland. Formerly it was the fashion among the learned all over Europe to call those letters Anglo-Saxon : but now people know better.

## 2. *Monastic Schools.*

**Two Classes of Schools.**—The schools and colleges of ancient Ireland were of two classes, Ecclesiastical and Lay. The ecclesiastical or monastic schools were introduced with Christianity, and were conducted by monks. The lay or secular schools existed from a period of unknown antiquity, and in pagan times they were taught by druids. The Irish monastic schools were celebrated all over Europe in the middle ages: the lay schools, though playing an important part in spreading learning at home, were not so well known. These two classes of schools are well distinguished all through the literary history of Ireland, and, without interfering with each other, worked contemporaneously from the fifth to the nineteenth century.\*

**General features of monastic schools.**—Even from the time of St. Patrick there were schools in connexion with several of the monasteries he founded, chiefly for the education of young men intended for the church. But when the great monastic movement already spoken of (p. 322) began, in the sixth century, then there was a rapid

\* A full and most interesting account of the ancient Irish monastic schools and colleges has been given by the Most Rev. Dr. Healy, Archbishop of Tuam, in his book "Ireland's Ancient Schools and Scholars." A mere list of the schools treated of in this book, and in Lanigan's Ecclesiastical History, will give some idea of the spread of education in Ireland in those early times, especially when it is remembered that this list includes none of the lay schools:—Armagh; Kildare; Nendrum (in Strangford Lough, County Down); Louth; Emly (in Tipperary); Begerin (an island in Wexford Harbour); Cluain-fois (near Tuam in Galway); Elphin (in Roscommon); Aran Island (in Galway Bay); Clonard (on the Boyne in Meath); Clonfert (in Galway); Movilla (near the present Newtownards); Clonmacnoise; Glasnevin (near Dublin); Derry; Durrow (in King's County); Kells (in Meath); Bangor (in County Down); Clonenagh (in Queen's County); Glendalough; Lismore; Cork; Ross Ailither (now Rosscarbery in Cork); Innisfallen (in the Lower Lake of Killarney); Mungrat (near Limerick city); Inishcaltra (now Holy Island in Lough Derg on the Shannon); Birr; Roscrea; Mayo; Downpatrick; Tuam; Slane (on the Boyne above Drogheda). Most of these were carried on simultaneously from the sixth century downwards.

growth of schools and colleges all over the country: for almost every large monastery had a school attached: and it often happened that a school rose up round some scholar of exceptional eminence where it was not intended. Many of these contained great numbers of students. Under each of the three fathers of the Irish Church, St. Finnen in Clonard, St. Comgall in Bangor, and St. Brendan in Clonfert, there were 3000, including no doubt monks as well as students; St. Molaise had 1500; St. Gobban 1000; and so on down to the school of Glasnevin, where St. Mobi had 50. This last—fifty—was a very usual number in the smaller monastic schools. How such large numbers as those in Clonard, Bangor, and Clonfert obtained living and sleeping accommodation will be found described farther on. That there is not necessarily any or much exaggeration in these statements as to numbers appears from the record of the Venerable Bede, that the monastery of Bangor in Wales was divided into seven parts, each with a leader, and that none of these divisions contained less than 300 men, all supporting themselves by the labour of their hands: which would bring up the whole population of this Bangor school near or altogether to 3000.\*

In these schools secular as well as ecclesiastical learning was carefully attended to; for besides divinity, the study of the Scriptures, and classics, for those intended for the church, the students were instructed—as we shall see—in general literature and science. Accordingly, a large proportion of the students in these monastic schools were young men—amongst them sons of kings and chiefs—intended, not for the church, but for ordinary civil or military life, who attended to get a good general education. To quote one example where such students are mentioned incidentally:—We read in the Four Masters, under A.D. 643 (*recte*, 648), that Ragallach, king of Connaught, was assassinated. At this time his second son

\* Bede, Eccl. Hist., II. ii. See Lynch, Cambr. Ev. 277.



Cathal was a student in the College of Clonard; and when he heard of his father's murder, he and a party of twenty-seven of his fellow-students, *all young laymen from Connaught*, sallied forth from the college, and coming to the house of the assassin, beheaded him.\* In case of kings of high rank, however, the young princes were generally educated at home, the teachers residing at court and taking rank with the highest. In those great seminaries, every branch of knowledge then known was taught: they were in fact the prototypes of our modern universities. "We must"—writes Dr. Richey—"neither overestimate nor depreciate these establishments. They undoubtedly were in advance of any schools existing on the Continent; and the lists of books possessed by some of the teachers prove that their institutions embraced a considerable course of classical learning."†

Learning was not confined to men. In the sixth century King Branduff's mother had a writing style (*delg graiph*), so that she must have practised writing on waxed tablets; and this is spoken of in the old record as a matter of common occurrence among ladies.‡ The daughter of the king of Cualann was sent to Clonard to St. Finnen to learn to read her Psalms [in Latin].§ One of the First Order of Irish saints named Mugint founded a school in Scotland, to which girls as well as boys were admitted to study;|| and St. Ita enjoins her foster-son St. Brendan, when a young man, not to study with women lest some evil-disposed person might revile him.¶

**Extent of Learning in Monastic Schools.**—We have ample evidence that both the Latin and Greek languages and literatures were studied with success in Ireland from

\* O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, I. 83

† Richey, *Short Hist. of the Irish People*, 1887, p. 83

‡ *Zeitschr. für Celt. Phil.*, II. 137, 17.

§ Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, line 4128.

|| De Jubainville, *La Civil. des Celtes*, 109, 110.

¶ Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, p. 251.

the sixth to the tenth century ; and that the learned men from the Irish schools were quite on a par with the most eminent of the Continental scholars of the time, and not a few at the head of all. Columbanus, Aileran the Wise, Cumman, Sedulius, Fergil the Geometer, Duns Scotus, and many others, all Irishmen and educated in Irish schools, were celebrated throughout Europe for their learning. The most distinguished scholar of his day was John Scotus Erigena (' John the Irish Scot '), celebrated for his knowledge of Greek, and for his philosophical speculations. He taught philosophy in Paris, and died about the year 870\*



FIG. 118.

When the dispute about the time of celebrating Easter was at its height, St. Cumman wrote a Latin letter to Segienus, abbot of Iona, in defence of the Roman custom, and urging him to adopt it in Iona, which is published in Ussher's works, and occupies twelve pages of vol. iv. " Cumman's letter regarding the Easter festival," writes Skene in his *Celtic Scotland*. " shows a perfect mastery of his subject, and may compare with any ecclesiastical document of the time."

\* For John Scotus Erigena, see Lanigan, III. 288-319 : and for the others see the works named in note, next page.

John Scotus Erigena. According to William of Malmesbury and other authorities, John, obliged to fly from France on account of some heterodox writings, took refuge with Alfred the Great in England, who employed him "as an instrument for the restoration of literature in Oxford": but Lanigan (III. 300) considers this story unfounded. However this may be, his portrait, with that of Alfred, was, according to Dr. Petrie, long preserved sculptured in stone over the door of the refectory of Brazenose College, Oxford. Petrie drew it and published his faithful sketch in the *Dublin Penny Journal*, I p. 61, from which this illustration has been photographed.

"This long letter," observes Professor George T. Stokes, "proves to demonstration that in the first half of the seventh century there was a wide range of Greek learning, not ecclesiastical merely, but chronological, astronomical, and philosophical, away in Durrow in the very centre of the Bog of Allen."\* The Irish monks were equally famed for their theological learning. It is worthy of remark that, so far as theology and sacred learning in general were concerned, the University of Armagh seems to have been regarded as the head of all the other schools and colleges; for in the synod held at Clane (County Kildare) in the year 1162, where twenty-five bishops and many other ecclesiastics of high rank attended, it was decreed that no person should thenceforward be permitted to give public lectures in the sacred Scriptures or in theology in any part of Ireland unless he had studied for some time at Armagh.† It seems probable that this was merely rendering compulsory what had long been the custom.

**Foreign Students.**—In all the more important schools there were students from foreign lands, from the Continent as well as from Great Britain, attracted by the eminence of the masters and by the facilities for quiet, uninterrupted study. In the Lives of distinguished Englishmen we constantly find such statements as "he was sent to Ireland to finish his education."‡ The illustrious scholar Alcuin, who was a native of York, was educated at Clonmacnoise. Among the foreign visitors were many princes: Oswald and Aldfrid, kings of Northumbria, and Dagobert II.,

\* See the Most Rev. Dr. Healy's *Ireland's Ancient Schools and Scholars*, *passim*: Dr. Hyde's *Literary History of Ireland*, chap. xvii.: the Rev. Dr. George T. Stokes's article on *The Knowledge of Greek in Ireland between A.D. 500 and A.D. 900*, in *Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad.* for 1891-1892, p. 187: Skene's *Celtic Scotland*, II. 419: and Lanigan, *Eccl. Hist.*, I. 58. In these works will be found an account of all those eminent men named in last page.

† Lanigan, IV. 178: Lynch, *Cambr. Ev.*, II. 383, 427: and FM, A.D. 1162.

‡ O'Flaherty, *Ogyg.*, III. xxx.

king of France, were all educated in Ireland.\* It appears that Aldfrid while in Ireland was called Flann Fina (from his mother Fina, an Irish princess); and there is still extant a very ancient Irish poem in praise of Ireland, said to have been composed by him: it has been translated by O'Donovan in the 'Dublin Penny Journal,' vol. i., p. 94, and metrically by J. Clarence Mangan. We get some idea of the numbers of foreigners from the ancient Litany of Aengus the Culdee, in which we find invoked many Romans, Gauls, Germans, and Britons, all of whom died in Ireland. To this day there is to be seen, on Great Aran island, a tomb-stone, with the inscription "VII Romani," Seven Romans. It is known that in times of persecution Egyptian monks fled to Ireland; and they have left in the country many traces of their influence. In the same Litany of Aengus mention is made of seven Egyptian monks buried in one place.†

Scattered over the Lives of the Irish Saints are innumerable passages—many of them legendary, or mixed up with legend, but none the less presenting a true picture of what really took place—recording the arrival in Ireland of foreign pilgrims and students, or notifying their residence or death. Here is one characteristic legend from

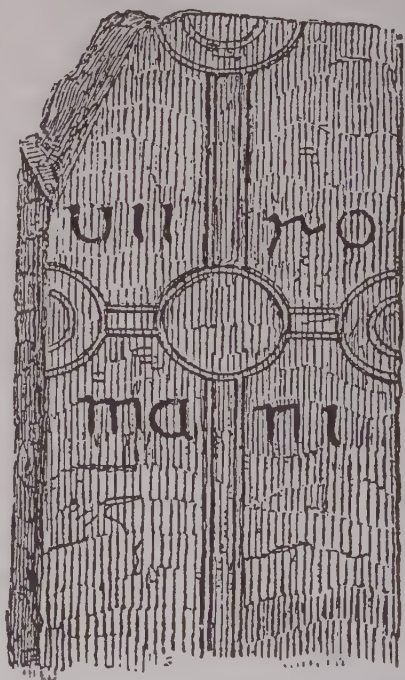


FIG. 119.

Tombstone of the "Seven Romans," in Aran  
(From Petrie, Round Towers, p. 139.)

\* Lanigan, Eccl. Hist., III. 90, 100: see also Reeves, Adamn., 185, note 2.

† Petrie, Round Towers, 137, 138: see also Lynch, Cambr. Ev., II. 671.



the Irish Life of St. Senan :—“ Then came a ship’s crew from the lands of Latium on a pilgrimage into Ireland : five decades were their number.” The old document goes on to say that each decade took one of the Irish saints as patron and protector during the voyage, namely Saints Finnen, Senan, Brendan, Ciaran, Finnbarr ; and they arranged that each saint was to be asked by his votaries to protect the ship for a night and a day in turn. All went well till it came to the turn of Senan’s ten, when there arose a dangerous storm, and the pilot called out to them for help : whereupon one of them, a bishop, rose up from his dinner with a thigh-bone in his hand, and blessing the air with the bone, he called on Senan for help, on which the storm was instantly lulled, and they soon after landed safely in Cork.\*

The greatest number of foreign students came from Great Britain — they came in *fleet-loads* as Aldhelm, Bishop of Sherborne (A.D. 705 to 709), expresses it in his letter to his friend Eadfrid, Bishop of Lindisfarne, who had himself been educated in Ireland.† Many also were from the Continent. There is a remarkable passage in Venerable Bede’s “ Ecclesiastical History ” which corroborates Aldhelm’s statement, as well as what is said in the native records, and indeed in some particulars goes rather beyond them. Describing the ravages of the yellow plague in 664 he says :—“ This pestilence did no less harm “ in the island of Ireland. Many of the nobility and of “ the lower ranks of the English nation were there at that “ time, who, in the days of Bishops Finan and Colman “ [Irish abbots of Lindisfarne, p. 339, *supra*] forsaking their “ native island, retired thither, either for the sake of divine “ studies, or of a more continent life : and some of them

\* Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, 209.

† Aldhelm was an unwilling witness, for he shows himself jealous of the literary attractions of Ireland. See Reeves in *Ulst. Journ. of Archæol.* vii. 237, note v.

“ presently devoted themselves to a monastic life: others  
 “ chose rather to apply themselves to study, going about  
 “ from one master’s cell to another. The Scots willingly  
 “ received them all, and took care to supply them with  
 “ food, as also to furnish them with books to read, and  
 “ their teaching, all gratis.”\* We know that one of the  
 three divisions of the city of Armagh was called *Trian-*  
*Saxon*, the Saxon’s third, from the great number of Saxon  
 students inhabiting it; and we learn incidentally also that



FIG. 120.

Clonmacnoise in 1825—much the same as at present. A great Irish monastery, founded by St. Ciaran, A.D. 548, where was also one of the most important of the monastic colleges. (From Brewer’s Beauties of Ireland. Drawn by Petrie.)

in the eighth century seven streets of a town called Kilbally, near Rahan in King’s County, were wholly occupied by *Galls* or foreigners.†

The genuine respect entertained all over Europe for the scholars of Ireland at this period is exemplified in a correspondence of the end of the eighth century between the illustrious scholar Alcuin and Colcu the *Fer-leginn*, or chief professor of Clonmacnoise, commonly known as

\* Eccl. Hist., iii. chap. xxvii: Bohn’s translation.

† Petrie, Round Towers 355, top; O’Curry, Man. & Cust., ii., 38.

Colcu the Wise. He was the most learned Irishman of his time, and we have extant a beautiful Irish prayer composed by him (See *Otia Mers.* II. 92). Alcuin was educated by him at Clonmacnoise, and in his letters he expresses extraordinary respect for him, styles him "Most holy father," calls himself his son, and sends him presents for charitable purposes, some from himself and some from his great master Charlemagne.\* In the course of three or four centuries from the time of St. Patrick, Ireland was the most learned country in Europe: and it came to be known by the name now so familiar to us—*Insula sanctorum et doctorum*, the Island of Saints and Scholars.†

**Fer-leginn.**—In early times, when a school or college was attached to a monastery, it would appear that the abbot had the charge of both monastery and schools, deputing his authority in special directions, so as to divide the labour, as he found it necessary. But this was found at last to be an inconvenient arrangement; so that towards the end of the eighth century, it became the custom to appoint a special head professor to preside over, and be responsible for, the educational functions of the college, while the abbot had the care of the whole institution. None but a *Druimcli*—a man who had mastered the entire course of learning (see p. 436, below)—could be appointed to this important post, and as head of the college—under the abbot—he was called *Fer-leginn*, 'man of learning'—i.e. Chief Lector, *Scholasticus*, or 'Principal,' having all the other professors and teachers—with their several subjects—under his authority. The first of these officers, of whom we have any record, was Colcu, Fer-leginn of Clonmacnoise, already noticed, who died in 794. The Fer-leginn was generally an ecclesiastic, but

\* Lanigan, III. 229: O'Curry, MS. Mat., 379.

† This name was applied to Ireland by the chronicler Marianus Scotus, who lived in the eleventh century: but whether it had been previously used or not is not known. See Reeves, *Ulst. Journ. of Archæol.*, VII. 228.

occasionally a layman. In Monasterboice, Flann the Annalist, a layman, the most distinguished scholar in Ireland of his time, was appointed Fer-leginn. This man, who died A.D. 1056, has left behind him some learned works in the Irish language; and he has ever since been known as *Flann Mainistrech*, or 'Flann of the Monastery.' About a century earlier the lay *ollave* or doctor-poet Mac Cossé held a similar position in the great school of Ros-Ailithir, now Ross Carbery, in Cork. It is worthy of remark that many of the learned men commemorated in our annals were teachers in colleges for life or for some time, either as Fer-leginn, or in some other capacity.

### 3. Lay Schools.

It has been sometimes asserted that, in early times in Ireland, learning was confined within the walls of the monasteries; but this view is quite erroneous. Though the majority of the men of learning in Christian times were ecclesiastics, secular learning was by no means confined to the clergy. We have seen that the monastic schools had many lay pupils, and that there were numerous lay schools; so that a considerable body of the lay community must have been more or less educated—able to read and write. Nearly all the professional physicians, lawyers (or *brehons*), poets, builders, and historians, were laymen; a large proportion of the men chronicled in our annals, during the whole period of Ireland's literary pre-eminence, as distinguished in art and general literature, were also laymen; lay tutors were often employed to teach princes; and, in fact, laymen played a very important part in the diffusion of knowledge and in building up that character for learning that rendered Ireland so famous in former times. One has only to glance through Ware's or O'Reilly's "Irish Writers," or Dr. Hyde's "Literary History of Ireland," to see the truth of this.



It is right to remark, too, that the ecclesiastical authorities were by no means jealous or intolerant of literary distinction among the lay community. On the contrary, they encouraged learning wherever they found it, making no distinction between monk and layman. We have seen that in Monasterboice and Ros-Ailithir, where, as in all other monastic colleges, the entire authority was in the hands of ecclesiastics, they appointed laymen to the position of *Ficr-leginn*, or Principal; and they did this, knowing well that, as far as secular scholarship was concerned, these two distinguished laymen were sure to throw them all into the shade. In various other monastic colleges also the minor positions were often held by lay teachers.

But the education for the lay community—in the sense in which the word “education” is used in the preceding observations—was mainly for the higher classes, and for those of the lower who had an irrepressible passion for book-learning. The great body of the people could neither read nor write. Yet they were not uneducated: they had an education of another kind—reciting poetry, historic tales, and legends—or listening to recitation—in which all people, high and low, took delight, as mentioned elsewhere. This was true education, a real exercise for the intellect, and a real and refined enjoyment.\* In every hamlet there were one or more amateur reciters: and this amusement was then more general than newspaper- and story-reading is now. So that, taking education, as we ought, in this broad sense, and not restricting it to the narrow domain of reading and writing, we see that the great body of the Irish people of those times were really educated.

There seems no reason to doubt that there were schools of some kind in Ireland before the introduction

\* On the educational function of the Tales, see pages 426, 427, 540, 541 farther on.

of Christianity, which were carried on by druids. After the general spread of Christianity, while monastic schools were growing up everywhere through the country, the old schools still held their ground, taught now by Christian ollaves or doctors—laymen—who were the representatives of the druid teachers of old times.\*

There were several classes of these schools. Some were known as "Bardic schools," in which were taught poetry, history, and general Irish literature. Some were for law, and some for other special professions. In the year 1571, hundreds of years subsequent to the period we are here treating of, Campion found schools for law and medicine in operation:—"They speake Latine like a vulgar tongue, learned in their common schools of leach-craft and law, whereat they begin [as] children, and hold on sixteene or twenty yeares, conning by roate the Aphorismes of *Hypocrates* and the Civill Institutions, and a few other parings of these two faculties."† The "sixteene or twenty years" is certainly an exaggeration. The Bardic schools were the least technical of any: and young laymen not intended for professions attended them—as many others in greater numbers attended the monastic schools—to get a good general education. Some of these lay schools—perhaps most—were self-supporting, and the teachers made their living by them; while some were aided with grants of land by the chiefs of the Districts.

At the convention of Drum-Ketta, A.D. 574, the system of public secular education, so far as it was represented in the bardic schools or those for general education, was reorganised. The scheme, which is described in some detail by Keating (p. 455) from old authorities no longer in existence, was devised by the *ard-ollave* or chief poet of all Ireland, Dallan Forgaill, the author of the *Amra* or

\* See Hyde, Lit. Hist., 241.

† Campion, Hist. of Ireland, 25, 26.

Elegy on St. Columkille. There was to be a chief school or college for each of the five provinces ; and under these a number of minor colleges, one in each *tuath* or cantred. They were all endowed with lands ; and those persons who needed it should get free education in them. The heads of these schools were the ollaves of poetry and literature, all laymen.\* Many of them, as time went on, became noted for the excellence of their teaching in subjects more or less special, according to the individual tastes or bent of mind of the teachers or the traditions of the several schools. These subjects, whether Law, History, Antiquities, Poetry, etc., were commonly taught by members of the same family for generations.† In later times—towards the sixteenth century—many such schools flourished under the families of O'Mulconry, O'Coffey, O'Clery, and others. A lay college generally comprised three distinct schools, held in three different houses near each other : a custom that came down from pagan times. We are told that Cormac Mac Art, king of Ireland from A.D. 254 to 277, founded three schools at Tara, one for the study of military science, one for law, and one for general literature. St. Bricin's College at Tomregan near Ballyconnell in Cavan, founded in the seventh century, which, though conducted by an ecclesiastic, was of the type of the lay schools, comprised one school for law, one for classics, and one for poetry and general Gaelic learning, each school under a special *druimcli* or head professor.‡ And coming down to a much later period, we know that in the fifteenth century the O'Clery's of Donegal kept three schools—namely, for literature, for history, and for poetry.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century the public schools of all classes began to feel the effects of penal legislation. In the time of James I., among many other

\* See also O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, I. 78.

† See, for examples, Hy Fiachrach, 79, and 167, bottom.

‡ O'Curry, *MS. Mat.*, 50 : *Man. & Cust.*, I. 92.

schools, there was in Galway a flourishing academy for classics and general education, kept by the celebrated John Lynch, afterwards bishop of Killala, author of "*Cambrensis Eversus*." In 1615 the Commissioners appointed by King James to inquire into the state of education in Ireland, visited this school, which they found full of scholars, who came not only from Connaught, but from all parts of Ireland, attracted by the fame of school and teacher. The Commissioners in their report praise the school as highly efficient; but they gave orders that it should be closed, as Dr. Lynch refused to become a Protestant. It is humiliating to have to record that a leading member of the commission that issued this barbarous order was the great scholar James Ussher, afterwards archbishop of Armagh.\*

Through the dark time of the Penal Laws, which forbade all education to Catholics, the schools struggled on despite of Acts of Parliament. In some places the secular seminaries became narrowed to schools for poetry alone—or rather what then went by the name of poetry. In the Preliminary Dissertation to the "*Memoirs of the Marquis of Clanrickarde*" (Ed. 1744, p. cxiii) is a curious description of the manner in which these degenerate schools were carried on, which it is not necessary to quote here: the reader will find the substance of it in a more accessible book, Dr. Hyde's "*Literary History of Ireland*" (p. 528). A grotesque survival of the old method of study, to some extent confirming this writer's account, was found by Martin in one of the western islands of Scotland in 1703 (Martin, p. 116).

But through all this time there were schools with a broader culture—seminaries for general education. During the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth, when the Penal Laws against Catholic education were in great part or altogether removed, schools conducted

\* Petrie, in *Dub. Pen. Journ.*, 1. 326



by private individuals were found all over the southern half of Ireland, especially in Munster. Some were for classics, some for science, and not a few for both; nearly all conducted by men of learning and ability; and they were everywhere eagerly attended. Many of the students had professions in view, some intended for the priesthood, for which the classical schools afforded an admirable preparation; some seeking to become medical doctors, teachers, surveyors, &c. But a large proportion were the sons of farmers, tradesmen, shopkeepers, or others, who had no particular end in view, but, with the instincts of the days of old, studied classics or mathematics for the pure love of learning. These schools continued to exist down to our own time, till they were finally broken up by the famine of 1847. In my own immediate neighbourhood were some of them, in which I received a part of my early education; and I remember with pleasure several of my old teachers: rough and unpolished men most of them, but excellent solid scholars and full of enthusiasm for learning. All the students were adults or grown boys; and there was no instruction in the elementary subjects—reading, writing, and arithmetic—as no scholar attended who had not sufficiently mastered these.\* Among the students were always a dozen or more “poor scholars” from distant parts of Ireland, who lived free in the hospitable farmers’ houses all round: just as the scholars from Britain and elsewhere were supported in the time of Bede—twelve centuries before.†

#### 4. *Some General Features of both classes of Schools.*

“**The Seven Degrees of Wisdom.**”—To return to the ancient schools. The Brehon Law took cognisance of the schools, both lay and clerical, in many important

\* But there were also special private schools for elementary subjects.

† For “Poor Scholars,” see O’Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, i. 79, 80: Dr. Healy, *Ireland’s Anc. Sch.*, 475: and, for a modern instance, Carleton’s story, “The Poor Scholar.”

particulars. So much was this the case that it is in fact in the Brehon Law tracts we get the fullest information about the school arrangements. The law sets forth the studies for the several degrees. It lays down what seems a very necessary provision for the protection of the masters, that they should not be answerable for the misdeeds of their scholars except in one case only, namely, when the scholar was a foreigner and paid for his food and education.\* The masters had a claim on their literary foster-children for support in old age, if poverty rendered it necessary†; and in accordance with this provision, we find it recorded that St. Mailruan of Tallaght was tenderly nursed in his old age by his pupil Aengus the Culdee.‡

In both the ecclesiastical and the secular schools there were **seven degrees** for the students or graduates, like the modern University stages of freshmen, sophisters, bachelors &c. The degrees in the lay schools corresponded with those in the ecclesiastical schools; but except in the two last grades the names differed. Both schemes are set forth—in a scattered sort of way—in a law tract known as the “Sequel to the Crith Gabhlach” (Br. Laws, iv.); and the grades in the lay schools are also named and briefly described in another law tract, the “Small Primer” (Br. Laws, v. 27). The writer of the “Sequel” gives first the seven-fold arrangement for the ecclesiastical schools—the “Seven Degrees of Wisdom” § (*secht n-gráidh éana*). He then makes the following remark to point out the correspondence in substance between these and the seven stages of the lay schools:—“The degrees of wisdom and “of the church [*i.e.* in the monastic or ecclesiastical schools] “correspond with the degrees of the poets and of the *féine* “or story-tellers [*i.e.* of the lay or bardic schools]: but “wisdom is the mother of each profession of them [whether

\* Man. & Cust., i. 79.

† Vol. II., p. 18.

‡ O'Curry, Man. & Cust., i. 174, 175.

§ Learning in general was in those times often designated by the word “Wisdom.”

" clerical or lay], and it is from her hand they all drink." He next proceeds to enumerate the seven degrees of the poets, *i.e.* of the bardic schools, and to describe them,\* as set forth in this book, p. 430, farther on.

But regarding some of the lay schools, we obtain much additional information from a curious tract called the " Book of the Ollaves " (or " Doctors "), in the Book of Ballymote, first noticed by O'Curry;† where the arrangements for one particular class of schools are described in some detail. The schools in view here were the bardic schools, *i.e.* those for general learning: but in those for special professions, such as Law, there were probably similar arrangements. This tract gives the length of the whole course for the seven lay degrees as twelve years, which includes one year for preliminary, or elementary, or preparatory work, and sets forth the study for each year. A careful comparison and combination of the statements in the four law authorities—the Book of the Ollaves, the Sequel to the Crith Gabhlach, the Small Primer, and the Commentaries on the Senchus Mór—will enable us to knit together the information scattered through them, and to set forth in tabulated form (p. 430, *infra*) the schemes of both classes of schools. I have not found any statement giving the length of the course and the subjects of the several stages, or of the several years, for students of the ecclesiastical schools, such as is given in the Book of the Ollaves for the Lay schools, though it may be taken for granted that systematic and carefully-planned arrangements existed. On the other hand, we have, in still another law authority, a statement of the qualifications of the professors in the ecclesiastical schools, which is given at page 435 farther on.

Before setting forth the two tabulated schemes, it will be useful to make a few remarks on certain points in connexion with them. In the bardic schools—so far

\* Br. Laws, IV. 357, last seven lines, and 359. † Man. & Cust., I. 171.

as they are reflected in the authorities from which our tabulated scheme was constructed—no foreign languages were taught : and the instruction was confined to native learning—the learning that had grown up in the country from immemorial ages. Under the influence of ecclesiastics, however, schools for classics were sometimes joined with these, as we see in the case of the college of Tomregan (p. 420, *supra*). In later times many of the lay schools admitted classics among their subjects.\*

In the ecclesiastical schools the case was quite different. We have not, as has been already remarked, a detailed and systematic statement of the subjects in the several stages of the course in these schools. But from many scattered independent authorities we know that Latin was taught from the very beginning of the course, and was continued to the end, with all the Latin classics then available. Latin was indeed written and spoken quite familiarly in the schools—at least among the students of the higher stages : and as a matter of fact much of the Irish historical literature that remains to us is a mixture of Gaelic and Latin, both languages being used with equal facility. At a more advanced stage of the course Greek was introduced, and, as we have seen, was studied and taught with success. Along with the classics, philosophy, divinity, the Holy Scriptures, and science—so far as it was then known—were taught : so that the education in these schools was of a much higher order, wider, and more cultured than in the lay schools.

One part of the teaching, in both lay and ecclesiastical schools, consisted in explaining ancient Gaelic writings. For the Gaelic used by very early writers became in a great measure obsolete as centuries rolled on, as happens with all living languages. Accordingly, successive scholars wrote commentaries explaining most of the

\* Within the last century or so, special schools for classics were numerous, especially in Munster ; in which Latin was spoken quite familiarly.



obscure old texts; and after long lapse of time, when even the commentaries themselves became old and hard to understand, it was customary with many teachers to lecture on both texts and commentaries, and to expound the general meaning. For instance, the *Senchus Mór* was lectured and commented on in this manner in the law schools; and the Tripartite Life of St. Patrick, Dallan Forgaill's *Amra*, and Aengus's *Féilire*, were expounded by the divinity and literary lecturers in the monastic colleges.\* This custom prevailed down to the time of Campion, and doubtless later. He says in his *History* (p. 17)—written towards the end of the sixteenth century:—"But the true Irish [*i.e.* the ancient classical Irish] indeede differeth so much from that they commonly speake, that scarce one among five score can either write, read, or understand it. Therefore it is prescribed among certaine their Poets, and other Students of Antiquities."

The successful study of the Tales—shown in the tabulated scheme—meant that the student should know them perfectly by heart, so as to be able to recite any one or more of them at a moment's notice, for the instruction and amusement of a company. The knowledge of historic and romantic tales, and of poetry, was looked upon as an important branch of education: and with good reason; for they inculcated truthfulness, manliness, and—according to the standard of the times—all that was noble and dignified in thought, word, and action. Along with this, the greater part of the history, tradition, biography, and topography of the country, as well as history and geography in general, was thrown into the form of verse and tales. Stories and poetry therefore formed a leading item, not only among professional men, but in general education: and every intelligent layman was expected to know some tales and poems, so as to be able to take his part in amusing and instructing in mixed companies

\* See O'Curry, *MS. Mat.*, 348: and Hyde, *Lit. Hist.*, 154, 406.

when the occasion arose.\* This fashion continued down to recent times : and some of the brightest and most intelligent Irish peasants I ever met were men who were illiterate, so far as book-learning was concerned, but who were full of the living traditions and poetry of the past, and recited them with intense feeling and enthusiastic admiration. But the race is now well-nigh extinct. We have already seen (p. 87) that in old times candidates for admission to certain ranks of military service had to prove that they had mastered a specified and very considerable amount of poetry and tales : a provision which exhibits clearly what was considered the standard of education in those times, and shows also the universal love for intellectual enjoyments.

The learning and teaching functions were combined in some of the middle grades, as they were in the professor's programme at p. 435. Students who had attained to certain degrees in both cases were entrusted with the duty of teaching the beginners, if their taste or inclination lay in that way ; which was one of the means of getting through the heavy school-work : a plan, as we all know, often adopted in modern schools.

In the tables at p. 430, the first word (which is printed in **heavy type**) in the description of each part of the course is the designation of the graduate of that particular stage : and these quaint designations are followed by the equally quaint descriptions. If at first sight they look fanciful, let us remember that most of our modern university terms—sizar, sophister, respondent, bachelor, wrangler, &c., when we look into their meanings, will appear equally so till we know their history. The three steps, *Ollaire*, *Taman*, *Drisac*, at the head of the Lay School scheme, are given by the commentator on the *Senchus Mór*, though not by the other authorities named above : but they were merely preparatory, and not recognised as “degrees of wisdom.”

\* As an instance : Donnbo in Three Fragm. of Ir. Annals, p. 35.

I do not know what the "Oghams" were, in the first three years' course of the lay schools. O'Curry translates the word "Alphabets," which is as obscure as the original. Perhaps the "Ogham" of the lay schools corresponded with the *aibgitir* or "alphabet" of the ecclesiastical schools (p. 383, *supra*): if this is so, the "Oghams" here were brief literary or scientific maxims conveying useful and important information. That there were collections of such terse maxims we know from Cormac's and O'Clery's Glossaries, in which they are designated *Minarba*, or *Mionairbhe*, a term which O'Clery explains: "*Mionairbhe ceard*, that is to say, short scientific rules which are in poetry." On account of their concentration and shortness, Cormac derives the word from Lat. *minus*: but it comes rather from the cognate Irish word *min* or *mion*, 'small.'

Dr. Richey, the legal editor of the Brehon Law volume containing the "Crith Gabhlach" and the "Sequel," judging from the single text before him, in which moreover there is nothing to warrant his conclusion, undertakes to pronounce the seven-fold classification of the degrees in the lay schools—Fochluc, Mac Fuirmid, Dos, Cana, Cli, Anruth, Ollave—as given in the table—to be "plainly merely an exercise of the imagination" (Br. Laws, iv. ccvii). But when he delivered this judgment, it was very lucky for him that he had not Morann's Collar round his neck.\* These poetical grades are enumerated in the "Small Primer" (Br. Laws, v. 27), a law tract totally independent of the "Sequel to the *Crith Gabhlach*," and they are referred to elsewhere in the Laws (vol. i. 45; v. 57 to 71: O'Curry, MS. Mat. 220); as well as in many independent authorities outside the law-books, always as matters quite familiar and generally understood. Cormac's Glossary mentions and explains the whole seven, using the very names given by the

\* Morann's Collar, pp. 170 and 303, *supra*.

authorities already referred to ; not all in one place, but in a disconnected way in various parts of the Glossary,\* as an actually existing and well-recognised arrangement in his own time, and evidently coming under his immediate observation. In the Book of Leinster, where is given the mode of pronouncing a *glam-dichenn* (see p. 240, *supra*), the whole seven are named—with the same designations, and in the same order, as given above—as taking part in the ceremony.† Keating (pp. 446, 454), in his account of the convention of Drum-Ketta, mentions two of them (Ollave and Anruth) in two different places—having no occasion to notice the others ; and several of them are named as among the guests at the banquets of Tara.‡ As showing not only the reality of this classification, but how long it held its ground, it is referred to in another document more than four centuries later than Cormac's Glossary, a poem written in 1351 in praise of William O'Kelly, who gave the banquet to the poets, mentioned at page 461 below, of which this is a translation of one verse :—

“ Here [to the banquet] will come the seven orders (*seacht n-gradha*)  
 Who put good poetry into shape :  
 A charm for misfortune is their coming—  
 The Seven Orders of Poetry.”§

There is, then, no reason whatever to doubt that this old gradation was a real one, and was actually carried out for hundreds of years in the schools : and that the graduate-poets were universally recognised, with their several special privileges, just as sizars, freshmen, sophisters, bachelors, moderators, masters, and doctors are now.

\* They will be found mentioned and discussed in the Glossary : Anruth, pp. 5 and 6 : Cana, 34 : Cli, 34 : Doss, 53, 58 : Fochlocon, 72 : Mac Fuirmid or Mucairbe, 107 : Ollam, 127. See also under “ Anair,” p. 6, same Glossary.

† Petrie Tara, 200, 205.

‡ O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, I. 217.

§ *Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad.*, vi. 51.



## TABLE OF DEGREES AND SUBJECTS OF STUDY.

COMPILED in strict accordance with the following authorities :—For Lay Schools only : Br. Laws, i. 45 : v. 27, 29 : Book of Ollaves, quoted in O'Curry's Man. & Cust., i. 171 : Mac Firbis, quoted by O'Curry in MS. Mat., 226, 576. For both Ecclesiastical and Lay Schools, Br. Laws, iv., 355 to 361.

MONASTIC OR ECCLESIASTICAL SCHOOLS.	BARDIC SCHOOLS.					
<p>[There must have been Elementary Stages in the Ecclesiastic as well as in the Lay Schools, but so far they have not been found expressly mentioned anywhere.]</p>	<p><i>First year of the twelve :—</i></p> <table><tr><td>a. <b>Ollaire,</b></td><td rowspan="3">}</td><td rowspan="3">The Students with these designations were engaged in elementary work, corresponding to what we find in our Elementary Schools, or in the junior classes of Intermediate Schools.</td></tr><tr><td>b. <b>Taman,</b></td></tr><tr><td>c. <b>Drisac,</b></td></tr></table> <p><b>COURSE OF STUDY :—</b>50 Oghams or Alphabets: Elementary <i>Araiccht</i> or Grammar: 20 Tales, of which the Ollaire had 7; the Taman 3 more, = 10: the Drisac 10 additional = 20.</p> <p><i>Second Year :—</i></p> <p><b>I.—Fochluc.</b> “ His art is slender because of his youth ”: like a sprig of <i>fochlocan</i> or brook-lime: hence the name.</p> <p><b>COURSE OF STUDY :—</b>50 Oghams along with the 50 of the Drisac: 6 easy lessons in Philosophy: certain specified poems: 30 Tales, <i>i.e.</i> 10 in addition to the 20 of the Drisac. [N.B.—It is the same all through: <i>i.e.</i> the number of Tales required for each grade includes those of the preceding grade.]</p>	a. <b>Ollaire,</b>	}	The Students with these designations were engaged in elementary work, corresponding to what we find in our Elementary Schools, or in the junior classes of Intermediate Schools.	b. <b>Taman,</b>	c. <b>Drisac,</b>
a. <b>Ollaire,</b>	}	The Students with these designations were engaged in elementary work, corresponding to what we find in our Elementary Schools, or in the junior classes of Intermediate Schools.				
b. <b>Taman,</b>						
c. <b>Drisac,</b>						

TABLE OF DEGREES AND SUBJECTS OF STUDY—*continued*.

MONASTIC OR ECCLESIASTICAL SCHOOLS.	BARDIC SCHOOLS.
<p>II.—<b>Freisneidhed</b> [Fresh-nay-a], or ' Interrogator ' : so called because " he interrogates his tutor with the sense of an ollave : and his tutor gives the meaning of everything that is difficult to him."</p> <p>(During this year a main and characteristic feature of the daily College work consisted in the learners questioning the teacher, at class time, in all the difficulties they had encountered—and noted—during their study hours : questions and explanatory replies being carried on in the hearing of the whole class.)</p> <p>III.—<b>Fursaindtidh</b> [Fursantee], or ' Illuminator ' : so called because " he answers his tutor with the sense of an ollave, and gives the sense of every difficulty on account of the clearness of his judgment."</p> <p>(In this year—when the pupils are more advanced—the mode of class-work is totally changed. Now the customary plan is for the tutor or professor to cross-question the learners ; to draw them out so as to make sure that they understood all difficulties and obscurities : to raise difficulties and make the pupils explain them).</p>	<p><i>Third Year :—</i></p> <p>II.—<b>Mac Fuirmid</b> : " so called because he ' is set ' (<i>fuirmithir</i>) to learn an art from his boyhood."</p> <p>COURSE OF STUDY :—50 Oghams more than the Fochluc (<i>i.e.</i> 150 altogether) : six minor lessons of Philosophy : Diphthongal Combinations (as part of Grammar) : certain specified Poems : 40 Tales.</p> <p><i>Fourth Year :—</i></p> <p>III.—<b>Dos</b>, so called " from his similarity to a <i>dos</i>, <i>i.e.</i> a bush or young tree."</p> <p>COURSE OF STUDY :—The <i>Bretha Nemed</i> or the Law of Privileges (see p. 175, <i>supra</i>) : 20 Poems of the species called <i>Eman</i> : 50 Tales.</p>

TABLE OF DEGREES AND SUBJECTS OF STUDY—*continued*.

MONASTIC OR ECCLESIASTICAL SCHOOLS.	BARDIC SCHOOLS.
<p>IV.—<b>Sruth do Aill</b>, or 'Stream from a cliff': for the <i>sruth</i> or stream "drowns every little, light, weak thing, and carries off loose rocks: so <i>he</i> drowns bad scholars whom he confounds [in disputation] with rocks of intellect and evidence [apt quotations], and he is able [when employed in teaching] to modify his instruction to the complexion of simple information, in mercy to the people of little learning who ebb in the presence of an <i>anruth</i> or teacher of a higher degree" [<i>i.e.</i> he is able to make hard things easy by explanation to weak students who might get frightened in presence of the formidable scholar the <i>anruth</i>—grade VI].</p> <p>V.—<b>Sai</b>, or "Professor who [has mastered and] professes some one of the four parts of the scientific course: a comely professor of the Canon [<i>i.e.</i> of Scripture] with his noble good wealth [of knowledge]."</p>	<p><i>Fifth Year :—</i></p> <p>IV.—<b>Cana</b> [accidentally omitted from the description in the Crith Gabhlach at p. 359, vol. IV., but inserted in the preliminary list of same tract at p. 357, last three lines; and in the other authorities].</p> <p>COURSE OF STUDY:—Learning critically Gaelic articles, adverbs, and other grammatical niceties: 60 Tales.</p> <p><i>Sixth Year :—</i></p> <p>V.—<b>Cli</b>, "which means a <i>cliath</i> or pillar" [of a house]: and as the pillar "is strong and straight, elevates and is elevated, protects and is protected, and is powerful from floor to ridge": so with the man of this grade: "his art is powerful, his judgment is straight: he elevates his dignity above those below him."</p> <p>COURSE OF STUDY:—The secret language of the poets (an abstruse kind of composition): 48 Poems of the species called <i>Nath</i>: 70 (or 80) Tales.</p>

TABLE OF DEGREES AND SUBJECTS OF STUDY—*continued*

MONASTIC OR ECCLESIASTICAL SCHOOLS.	BARDIC SCHOOLS.
<p>VI.—<b>Anruth</b>, which means 'noble stream': "so called for four reasons: for the nobleness of his teaching; for the number of his intellectual qualities; for the eloquence of his language; and because he composes in every department of poetry, literature, and synchronism [<i>i.e.</i> he has mastered them all so that he can speak and write with authority on them]: but only he does not reach to the top of knowledge" [as the Rosai or Ollave does].</p>	<p><i>Seventh, eighth, and ninth years —</i></p> <p>VI.—<b>Anruth</b>, which means "noble stream (from <i>an</i>, noble, and <i>sruith</i>, a stream), that is to say, a stream of pleasing praise issuing from him, and a stream of wealth to him" [in payments and presents for his poetry and learning].</p>
	<p>COURSE OF STUDY:—<i>Seventh Year</i> the <i>Brosnacha</i>, <i>i.e.</i> Miscellanies or Collections assigned to the <i>Sai</i> or Professor: the laws of Bardism, <i>i.e.</i> the special style of "Bardic" poetry.</p>
	<p><i>Eighth Year</i>: Prosody (a very complicated study): Glosses, <i>i.e.</i> the meaning of obsolete and obscure Gaelic words: <i>Teinm Laeghdha</i>, <i>Imbas Forosnai</i>, and <i>Dichetal do Chennibh</i> (see p. 242, <i>supra</i>): Dinnsenchus or Historical Topography [of Ireland].</p>
	<p><i>Ninth Year</i>: A certain specified number of each of those compositions called <i>Sennat</i>, <i>Luasca</i>, <i>Nena</i>, <i>Eochraid</i>, <i>Sruith</i>, and <i>Duili Feda</i>. To master 175 Tales during the three years; <i>i.e.</i> 105, or 95, in addition to those of the <i>Cli</i>.</p>



TABLE OF DEGREES AND SUBJECTS OF STUDY—*continued.*

MONASTIC OR ECCLESIASTICAL SCHOOLS.	BARDIC SCHOOLS.
<p>VII.—<b>Rosai</b>, which means 'Great Professor' (from <i>ro</i>, great, and <i>sai</i>, a professor). He has three designations:—<b>Rosai</b>; <b>Ollamh</b> or doctor; and <b>Sai Litre</b> or Professor (doctor) of Literature. When he visits a palace, he sits in the banqueting-house with the king. As he is a great professor, he does not fail in any question in the four departments of knowledge.</p>	<p><i>Tenth, eleventh, and twelfth years :</i></p> <p>VII.—<b>Ollamh</b> [ollav]. He has three designations:—Ecc [aikas] or man of learning <b>File</b> [filla], a poet; and <b>Ollamh</b>, or doctor. The Ollamh of wisdom or learning teaches the four departments of Filidecht or knowledge, without ignorance in them.</p> <p>COURSE OF STUDY :—<i>Tenth Year</i> a further number of those compositions studied in the ninth year</p> <p><i>Eleventh Year :</i> 100 of the kind of composition called <i>Anamuin</i> which was composed only by an Ollave.</p> <p><i>Twelfth Year :</i> 120 Cetals or Orations : the Four Arts of Poetry.</p> <p>N.B.—During the three years he had to master 175 Tales along with the 175 of the Anruth = 350 Tales altogether.</p> <p>At the end of the twelfth year if the candidate acquitted himself satisfactorily, he became an <i>Ollamh</i> or Ollave.</p>

In the ecclesiastical schools there was another classification of seven grades, or "Seven Orders of wisdom," as they are here also called, which is so different from that already given—corresponding in no particular except in the number of grades—that the two were obviously quite independent of each other. The scheme already given

had chiefly the students in view. But this one is evidently a classification having reference mainly to professors or teachers, of whom three of the lower grades were themselves learners. So that here, as in the preceding scheme, the functions of teaching and learning were mixed; and it often happened that the same person was at one time under instruction from the professors of the grades above him, and at another time employed in teaching the junior scholars. This document—quoted by O'Curry—occurs under the word *caogdach* in a Law Glossary compiled by Duaid Mac Firbis, from old authorities, explaining the "Seven Orders of wisdom."\*

#### THE SEVEN GRADES OR ORDERS OF WISDOM.

##### (MONASTIC OR ECCLESIASTICAL SCHOOLS).

- I.—The CAOGDACH or 'Fifty-Man' (from *caogad*, 'fifty'), so called because he is able to chant [in Latin] three times fifty Psalms from memory.
- II.—The FOGHLAINTIDHE [Fowlantee], *i.e.* a 'student' or 'learner': who has a knowledge of ten books of the *Fochair* or Native Education.
- III.—The *Desgibal* or 'Disciple,' who knows the whole twelve books of the *Fochair*.
- IV.—The STARUIDHE [stärree] or 'Historian,' who [besides History] is master of thirty Lessons of Divinity (*aiceachta naomhtha*, lit. 'Sacred Lessons'), as part of his course.
- V. The FOIRCEADLA DHE [Forkailee], *i.e.* 'Lecturer' of Profane Literature, who knows Grammar, *Crosan* or Criticism, Syllabification or Orthography, Enumeration or Arithmetic, and the courses of the Sun and Moon, *i.e.* Astronomy.
- VI. The SAOI CANOINE [Pron. See Connōna] "Professor of Canon, *i.e.* Divinity Professor, who has full knowledge of the Canon," and of the History of Jesus in the sacred place in which it is to be found [namely, the Bible], that is to say, the man learned in 'Catholic Canonica Wisdom.'

\* O'Curry, MS. Mat., 31, 494: Man. & Cust. i. 84.

VII.—The *Druimcli*\* [Drumclee], a man who has a perfect knowledge of wisdom "from the greatest book, which is called the *Cuilmen*, to the smallest book, which is called the 'Ten Words,'† which are well arranged in the good Testament which God made unto Moses."

O'Curry (MS. Mat., 495) quotes a curious note—characteristically Irish—from another old authority (about A.D. 1450), which corroborates the above in the form of a quaint pedigree of learning:—"Schoolboy [*i.e.* a mere "beginner"] the son of *Lesson* [*i.e.* a learner beginning to "read"], the son of *Caogdach*, the son of *Foghlaíntidhe*, the "son of *Descibal*, [the son of *Staruidhe*], the son of *Saoi* " *Litre*, the son of *Saoi Canóine*, the son of *Druimcli*, the "son of the Living God."

The two preceding classifications had special reference to collegiate life and collegiate arrangements. There was a third classification—seven ecclesiastical grades—having reference solely to the church. In each of the two former, as we have seen, there were "seven grades of wisdom or learning"; these last are called simply "seven grades of the church" (*seacht ngráid eacalsa*): namely, Lector or Reader (*Liachtreoir*); Janitor [and bell-ringer] (*Aistreoir*); Exorcist (*Exarcistid*); Sub-deacon (*Suibdeochain*); Deacon (*Dcochain*); Priest (*Sacart*); and Bishop (*Eascob*). These are all named, and their functions briefly set forth, in the law tract called the "Small Primer" (Br. Laws, v. 23). The "Seven Orders of the church" and the "Seven Orders of wisdom" are expressly distinguished in the "Heptads" (Br. Laws, v. 237, 6).

**School Life and School Methods.**—Reading through the ecclesiastical and other literature, we often light on

\* *Druimcli*, lit. 'ridge-pole,' *i.e.* of a house: from *druim*, 'ridge,' and *cli*, a short form of *cliath*, a 'pole.'

† The *Cuilmen* seems to have been a great book or collection of profane literature. The "Ten Words," or Ten Commandments, O'Curry says, was the usual designation of the Pentateuch.

incidental passages that give us many an occasional glimpse into the Irish colleges, so as to enable us to judge how professors and students lived, and, as it were, to see them at their work. Some students lived in the houses of the people of the neighbourhood: "poor scholars"—the precursors of those mentioned at page 422, *supra*. A few resided in the college itself—those, for instance, who were literary foster-children of the masters.\* But the body of the scholars lived in little houses built mostly by themselves around and near the school. Of this custom, we have many notices in our old writings. In the Irish Life of St. Columkille we are told that when he went as a student to the college of St. Finnen at Clonard, his first step was to ask Finnen:—"In what place shall I build my hut?" (Irish *both*, 'a hut': pron. boh). "Build it just beside the church," replied Finnen.† In the same Life (p. 174), we read that St. Mobi had fifty students in his school at Glasnevin, near Dublin, who had their huts (*botha*) ranged along one bank of the river (the Tolka), while their little church was on the opposite bank. Sometimes several lived together in one large house. In the leading colleges, whole streets of these houses surrounded the monastery, forming a collegiate town.

The poorer scholars sometimes lived in the same houses with the rich ones, whom they waited on and served, receiving in return food, clothing, and other necessities; like the American custom of the present day. But some chose to live in this humble capacity, not through poverty, but as a self-imposed discipline and mortification, like Adamnan, mentioned here. As illustrating this phase of school life, an interesting story is told in the Life of King Finaghta the Festive. A little before his accession, he was riding one day towards Clonard with his retinue, when they overtook a boy with a jar of milk on his back. The youth, attempting to get

\* Vol. II. page. 18.

† Stokes, Lives of SS., 173.



out of the way, stumbled and fell, and the jar was broken and the milk spilled. The cavalcade passed on without noticing him ; but he ran after them in great trouble with a piece of the jar on his back, till at last he attracted the notice of the prince, who halted and questioned him in a good-humoured way. The boy, not knowing whom he was addressing, told his story with amusing plainness :—  
 “ Indeed, good man, I have much cause to be troubled.  
 “ There are living in one house near the college three  
 “ noble students, and three others that wait on them, of  
 “ whom I am one ; and we three attendants have to collect  
 “ provisions in the neighbourhood in turn for the whole  
 “ six. It was my turn to-day ; and lo, what I have  
 “ obtained has been lost ; and this vessel which I borrowed  
 “ has been broken, and I have not the means to pay for it.”

The prince soothed him, told him his loss should be made good, and promised to look after him in the future. That boy was Adamnan, a descendant and relative of princes, subsequently a most distinguished man, ninth abbot of Iona, and the writer of the *Life of St. Columba*. The prince was as good as his word, and after he became king invited Adamnan to his court, where the rising young ecclesiastic became his trusted friend and spiritual adviser.\*

There were no spacious lecture halls such as we have : the masters taught and lectured, and the scholars studied, very much in the open air, when the weather permitted.† There were no prizes and no cramming for competitive examinations, for learning was pursued for its own sake. In all the schools, whether public or private, a large proportion of the students got both books and education free ; but those who could afford it paid for everything. In those days there were no detailed Latin Grammars, no “ First Latin Books ” : and the learners had to face the language in a rough-and-ready way, by beginning right

\* O’Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, i. 79 : Three *Fragm.*, 75 : Reeves, *Adamn.*, xlii.

† Dr. Healy, *Irel. Anc. Sch.*, 435 : O’Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, i. 149 (twice).

off at the author. While the students held their manuscript copies in their hands, the teacher read, translated, and explained the text; and in this rugged and difficult way these young people acquired a knowledge of the language. In order to aid the learners, the professors and teachers often wrote between the lines or on the margin of the copies of the Latin classical texts, literal translations of the most difficult words, or free renderings of the sense into Gaelic phrases: and in this manner were produced the glosses described in chap. xii., sect. 3, *infra*.

In teaching a child book-learning, the first thing was, of course, the alphabet. St. Columkille's first alphabet was written or impressed on a cake, which he afterwards



FIG. 121

Roman Alphabet, for learners, on a pillar-stone, now used as a headstone in the graveyard of Kilmalkedar in Kerry. The first letter, A, has been broken off. The three large letters near the centre are not part of the alphabet: they are DNI, an abbreviation of "Domini," which was on the stone before the alphabet was engraved. Compare this, as well as the abbreviations at the end, with the first of the two alphabets at p. 406, *supra*. (From Petrie, Round Towers, 134.)

etc.\* This points to a practice, which we sometimes see at the present day, of writing the alphabet, or shaping it in some way, on sweetmeats, as an encouragement and help to what has been, and always will be, a difficult task for a child. Sometimes they engraved the alphabet for beginners on a large stone, of which an example is shown in fig. 121.

It was the practice of many eminent teachers to compose educational poems embodying the leading facts of history or of other branches of instruction; and a considerable proportion of the metrical compositions preserved

\* Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, 172.

in our ancient books belong to this class. These poems having been committed to memory by the scholars, were commented on and explained by their authors. Flann of Monasterboice followed this plan; and we have still copies of several of his educational poems, chiefly historical. He also used his Synchronisms for the same purpose. In the Book of Leinster there is a curious geographical poem forming a sort of class-book of general geography, which was used in the great school of Ros-Ailithir in Cork, written in the tenth century by Mac Cosse the ferleginn, containing all that was then known of the principal countries of the world.\* The reader need scarcely be reminded that teachers of the present day sometimes adopt the same plan, especially in teaching history.

Sometimes boys were sent to be taught at the colleges at a very early age—mere children. When St. Findchua of Brigown was only seven years of age, he was brought by St. Comgall to his college at Bangor, “and studies there with him like every other pupil.”† St. Mochua of Balla, when he was only “a little lame child,” employed by his parents to herd sheep, was brought also to Bangor by Comgall, where he began his studies. There were probably many other cases of this kind, so that some special provision must have been made by the college authorities for the accommodation of such young children.

There was a very early appreciation of good methods in teaching. For instance, the maxim which all experienced teachers follow, that pupils are encouraged to exert themselves by getting moderate praise for their work, is noticed in one of the eighth-century glosses referred to by Zeuss:—“It is the custom of good teachers (*dagforcitlidib*) to praise “the understanding of the hearers [*i.e.* of their pupils],

\* Published, with translation, by the Rev. Thomas Olden, in Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad. for 1879–1886, p. 219. For many other poems of this class see O’Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, Lectures, vii. and viii.

† Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, 232.

"that they may love what they hear."\* There is a similar reminder in another eighth-century Irish gloss.†

So far the education given in schools and colleges, that is to say, literary education, has been dealt with. But there was a home education also, a simple sort of technical instruction in certain handicrafts and accomplishments that all must master to a greater or less extent in order to discharge the ordinary duties of everyday life. It would appear that fathers and mothers were left to their own discretion as to the training of their children in this direction. But in case of fosterage the law stepped in and laid down stringent rules for the home education of foster-children: from which we may infer that such instruction was supposed to be—and generally was—given by parents to their own children. The home education prescribed was very sensible, aiming directly at preparing for the future life of the child. The sons of the humbler ranks were to be taught how to herd kids, calves, lambs, and young pigs; how to kiln-dry corn, to prepare malt, to comb wool, and to cut and split wood: the girls how to use the needle according to their station in life, to grind corn with a quern, to knead dough, and to use a sieve. The sons of chiefs were to be instructed in archery, swimming, and chess-playing, in the use of the sword and spear, and horsemanship: the horse to be supplied by the father. But the law expressly states that no horses were to be given with boys of the Féine or farmer grade, for they were not taught horsemanship. The daughters of the chieftain grades given in fosterage were to be instructed in sewing, cutting-out, and embroidery. For the neglect of any of these branches of instruction there was a fine of two-thirds of the fosterage fee.‡

\* Given in full in Zimmer's Gloss. Hib., 69, 7; and in Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus*, I., p. 567.

† Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus*, p. 516. ‡ Br. Laws, II. 153, 161.



### 5. *The Men of Learning.*

**Professions Hereditary.**—In ancient Ireland, the professions almost invariably ran in families, so that members of the same household devoted themselves to one particular science or art—Poetry, History, Medicine, Building, Law, as the case might be—for generations. This is well expressed by Camden:—"And of these " professions there be in each territory several professors ; " and those within some certain families ; that is to say, " the Brehons [Judges] be of one flock and name ; the " historians of another ; and so of the rest, who instruct " their own children, and kinsmen, and have some of them " always to be their successors."\*

**Ollams or Doctors and their Requirements.**—*Ollam* or *ollamh* [ollav] was the title of the highest degree in any art or profession : thus we read of an ollave poet, an ollave builder, an ollave goldsmith, an ollave physician, an ollave lawyer, and so forth, just as we have in modern times doctors of law, of music, of literature, of philosophy, of medicine, &c.† In order to attain the degree of ollave, a candidate had to graduate through all the lower steps : and for this final degree he had to submit his work—whether literary compositions or any other performance—to some eminent ollave who was selected as judge. This ollave made a report to the " king of territories " (*i.e.* of a *mór-tuath*, see p. 43, *supra*), not only on the candidate's work, but also on his general character, whether he was upright, free from unjust dealings, and pure in conduct and word, *i.e.* free from immorality, bloodshed, and abuse of others. If the report was favourable, the king formally conferred the degree : a ceremony which the commentator on the *Senchus Mór* calls *wirdned ag rig tuath*, literally ' ordination by the king of territories.'‡

\* See Keating, Preface, lvi., lvii.

† See MS. Mat., 480 : Man. & Cust., II. 53 : and Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, line 2931 (ollave smiths).

‡ MS. Mat., 462 : Br. Laws, I. 43, last line.

Almost every ollave, of whatever profession, kept apprentices, who lived in his house, and who learned their business by the teaching and lectures of the master, by reading, and by actual practice, or seeing the master practise; for they accompanied him on his professional visits. The number under some ollaves was so large as to constitute a little school. There was, of course, a fee; in return for which, as the Brehon Law (v. 97) expresses it:—"Instruction without reservation, and correction "without harshness, are due from the master to the "pupil, and to feed and clothe him during the time he "is at his learning." Moreover, as in the case of the literary teacher (p. 423, *supra*), the pupil was bound to help the master in old age if poverty came on him.~ The same passage in the Brehon Law continues:—"To help "him against poverty, and to support him in old age [if "necessary], these are due from the pupil to the tutor."

Although there were ollaves of the various professions and crafts, this word "ollave" was commonly understood to mean a doctor of Poetry, or of History, or of both combined. These two professions—poetry and history—overlap a good deal, and the same individual generally professed both; as is put very clearly by Duaid Mac Fírbis in the following words:—"The historians of "Erin in the ancient times will scarcely be distinguished "from the *feinidh* [or story-tellers: pron. fainée], and "from those who are now called *aes-dána* ['poets'], for "it was often at one school they were all educated."\*

A literary ollave, as a *fili* or poet, was expected to be able to compose a quatrain, or some very short poem, extemporaneously, on any subject proposed on the moment: and he was always called upon to do so when the degree was conferred on him, this being an essential part of the ceremony:—"The ollave"—says the gloss on the *Senchus Mór*—"did this [*i.e.* composed

\* Quoted in MS. Mat., 220.

"an extempore quatrain] after his ordination [*i.e.* after "the degree was conferred on him] by the king of the "territories."\*

As a Shanachie or Historian, the ollave was understood to be specially learned in the History, Chronological Synchronisms, Antiquities, and Genealogies of Ireland. We have already seen (p. 434) that he should know by heart 350 Historical and Romantic Stories (namely 250 of what were called prime or principal stories and 100 minor; for which see p. 533, *infra*), so as to be able to recite any one or more of them when called upon at a moment's notice.

He was also supposed to know the prerogatives, rights, duties, restrictions, tributes, &c., of the king of Ireland, and of the provincial kings. "The poet or the learned "historian"—says the Book of Rights—"who does not "know the prerogatives and the prohibitions of these "kings is not entitled to visitation or to sale" [of his compositions]. Farther on in the same authority a similar statement is made in a more amplified and emphatic form: and here it is added that the ollave was expected, if asked, to repeat the whole statement from memory, "so that he can recite them all at each noble meeting."† As a learned man he was expected to answer reasonable questions, and explain difficulties:—"He is great to expound, and he expounds and solves questions"—says Corinac's Glossary (127, "Ollamh").

These were large requirements: but then he spent many years of preparation: and once admitted to the coveted rank, the guerdon was splendid; for he was highly honoured, had many privileges, and received princely rewards and presents. Elsewhere it is shown that a king kept in his household an ollave of each profession, who was well paid for his services. The

\* Br. Law, I. 43, bottom.

† Book of Rights, 7, 237, 239.

literary ollave never condescended to exercise his profession—indeed he was forbidden to do so—for any but the most distinguished company—kings and chiefs and such like, with their guests. He left the poets of the lower grades to attend a lower class of people. The prices for the compositions of the several grades of poets may be seen in the “Small Primer,” Br. Laws, v., pp. 57–71.

The poets *sang* their poems when reciting; and commonly accompanied themselves with the music of a small harp. This we know from many passages in old literature. Adamnan relates how on one occasion a poet came up to St. Columba beside Lough Key near Boyle in Roscommon. And when, after some conversation, he had gone away, the saint’s companions said to him:—“Why did you not ask Cronan the poet for a song to be sung musically after the manner of his art?”\* And again in another authority:—“On a certain day in the season of autumn, as Felim Mac Criffan, monarch of Erin, was in Cashel of the kings, there came to him the abbot of a church . . . who took his little eight-stringed harp from his girdle, and played sweet music, and sang a poem to it.”†

**The Irish Helicon.**—If we are to believe the legends, there was a royal road to the ollave’s great learning: for the ancient Irish had their Helicon as well as the Greeks. King Cormac Mac Art was on one occasion wandering through *Tir Tairngire* or Fairyland (see p. 293, *supra*), when he saw beside the rampart of a royal *dún* or palace a shining fountain with five streams issuing from it,

\* Adamnan, 80.

† O’Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, II. 262, quoting from the Book of Lecan. Felim was king of Munster in the ninth century, and *claimed* to be king of Ireland: see Joyce, *Short Hist. of Ireland*, 192. On this subject of musical accompaniment to singing, see De Jubainville, *La Civil. des Celtes*, 134: he remarks that the Homeric Greeks had the same custom. In all cases, whether Greek or Irish, the music was probably nothing more than a very simple chant.



making a murmur more melodious than any mortal music. There were five salmon swimming about in the well : and on the margin grew nine hazels which often dropped purple nuts into the water. The moment a nut fell, one of the salmon caught it, and rejecting the husk, ate the kernel. As Cormac looked on, he saw many people coming to the well in turn, and drinking. And when he inquired the meaning of these strange sights, he was told that this was the "Fountain of Knowledge" ; that the five streams were the five senses through which knowledge is obtained ; and that those who drank were at once endowed with great knowledge, so that they were thenceforward called " People of many arts and sciences " (*Lucht na n-ildan*).\*

The five salmon in this fountain were the same as the " Salmon of Knowledge " of another and better form of this legend. In the north of the present County Tipperary there was a beautiful fountain called Connla's Well, in which there were a number of salmon swimming about, and from which flowed a stream to the Shannon. Over this well there grew nine beautiful hazel trees, which produced blossoms and crimson nuts simultaneously. Whenever a nut dropped into the well, a salmon darted up and ate it ; and whatever number of nuts any one of them swallowed, so many bright red spots appeared on its belly. All the knowledge of the arts and sciences was in some mysterious way concentrated into these nuts ; and the salmon that ate of them became " a salmon of knowledge " (*Eó-fessa*), and swam down the stream to the Shannon. Whoever could succeed in catching and eating one of these salmon, his student drudgery was ended : for he became at once a great poet, and was, besides, endued with knowledge of all the arts and sciences. Hence poets and story-tellers, speaking of any subject difficult to deal with, often say :—" Unless I had eaten the salmon of

\* Ir. Texte, III. 213-216.

knowledge I could not describe it.”\* In Cormac’s Glossary (p. 35) these hazels are mentioned, showing the antiquity of the legend: here they are called by the name of *Caill Crinmon*, i.e. “hazels of scientific composition” [of poetry]: from *coll*, ‘hazel’: pl. *coill* or *caill*: and they are defined as “hazels from which come a new composition.” According to other accounts there was a fountain of this kind at the source of every chief river of Ireland.

**Chief Poet’s Mantle.**—On state occasions the chief poet of all Ireland wore a precious mantle elaborately ornamented, called *tugen* or *taiden*, and sometimes *stuigen*. In the Book of Rights (p. 33), it is stated that a knowledge of the privileges of the king of Cashel will always be found “with the chief poet of the Gael,” together with the *taiden*. Cormac’s Glossary (p. 160) derives *tugen* from *toga*: but it gives an alternative derivation which explains how this mantle was made:—“Otherwise *tuigen* is derived “from *tuige-en*. the ‘*tuige* or covering [of the feathers] of “birds’ [*én*]: for it is of skins of birds white and many-  
“coloured that the poets’ mantle from their girdle down-  
“wards is made, and of the necks of drakes and of their  
“crests [it is made] from their girdle upwards to their  
“neck.”

**Poet’s Musical Branch.**—All classes of poets were accustomed to carry a little musical branch† over their head which tinkled as they went along. That carried by an ollave was of gold; that by an anruth of silver; while all lower classes had a branch of bronze.‡

**Poet on Horseback.**—An *ollave* or *éces* rode on horseback on his journeys, so that a horsewhip (*echlaisc*) was looked upon as an essential for him, just as a *gipne* or cupping-horn was for a doctor. A man who had an action against a poet might distrain his horsewhip, leaving it with him

\* O’Curry, Man. & Cust., I. 143.

† For the musical branch see page 586, *infra*.

‡ O’Curry, Man. & Cust., II. 316: LL. 186, *a*, 39.

still, but with an injunction that he was not to use it (see p. 203, *supra*), which was understood to reduce him to helplessness, inasmuch as he could not ride without a whip.\*

**Fili and Bard.**—The word *fili* or *file* was applied to the highest orders of poets: also often called *éces* [aikas]. Both words signify 'a poet': but are generally understood to mean much more: not only a poet but a learned man in general—a philosopher. In Ireland there was in ancient times a marked distinction between a *file* and a bard. The word *bard* does not occur as the designation of any one of the ancient leading poetical degrees: but it was in common use to denote an inferior sort of poet. A bard was considered a mere rhymer, having neither the training nor the knowledge of a *file*. The distinction is noticed by the writer of the Book of Rights:—[The rights and privileges of the kings] "are not known to every prattling bard (*bárd bélghach*): it is not the right of a bard, but the right of a *file*, to know each king and his right."† The position of a bard is clearly stated in the Sequel to the Crith Gabhlach:—"A bard is one without lawful learning but his own intellect":‡ that is to say, one who had no regular training—such as was recognized by law—but became a rhymer by his native talent, like Robert Burns or Owen Roe O'Sullivan, who, if they had lived in Ireland a thousand years ago, would no doubt have been looked down upon as mere *bards* by the highly-trained *files* or ollave poets. In the statement of the twelve years' course in the Book of Ollaves, the bard is recognised officially; for it is laid down that in the seventh year was taught the "bardism of the bards" (see p. 433), so that a man who had mastered the seventh year's course

\* Br. Laws, II. 121, top.

† Book of Rights, 183: see also Kilk. Arch. Journ., 1868, pp. 287, 288.

‡ Br. Laws, IV. 361, 14.

was a bard. The distinction between a *file*-poet and a bard was kept up so late as 1351, when William O'Kelly gave the banquet to men of learning in general (see page 461 below), and among those invited were "*poetts, brehons, bardes, harpers, &c.*"\* Ultimately, however, the distinction was lost: and the word *bard* came to be applied to a poet of any kind. The poets who form the main subject of this chapter were the *filès*. Among the continental Celts, all of whom had their poets like those of Ireland, and held them in equal veneration, they were all without distinction called bards.†

**Poets' Visitations and Sale of Poems.**—In Ireland the position of the poets constituted perhaps the most singular feature of society. It had its origin in the intense and universal veneration for learning, which, however, as we shall see, sometimes gave rise to unhealthful developments that affected the daily life of all classes, but particularly of the higher. Every ollave *filè* was entitled to expect and receive presents from those people of the upper classes to whom he presented his poetical compositions: a transaction which the records openly call "selling his poetry." But unless he had the proper qualifications of the *filè* of some grade—namely those set forth in the table (p. 430), as well as some others—he had no claim to anything. In the Book of Rights (p. 237), we are told that the *filè* who does not know certain specified things is not entitled to "visitation" or to "sale for his compositions."

The ollave poet was entitled to go on *cuairt* [coort]—'circuit' or visitation: *i.e.* he went through the country at certain intervals with a retinue of twenty-four of his disciples or pupils,‡ and visited the kings and chiefs one after another, who were expected to lodge and entertain

\* Hy Many, 104.

† As to the Celtic *file* and *bard*, see De Jubainville, *La Civil. des Celtes*, 74 *et seq.* ‡ Corm. Gloss., 127 ("Ollamh"): Br. Laws, iv. 355, bottom.



them all for some time with lavish hospitality, and on their departure to present the ollave with some valuable present for his poetry; especially one particular prepared poem eulogising the chief himself, which was to be recited and presented immediately on the poet's arrival.\*

The poet had also a right to entertainment in the houses of public hospitality.† Sometimes an ollave poet, instead of going in person, sent round one of his principal pupils as deputy, with his poetry, who brought home to him the rewards; as in the case of Dubthach and Fiacc mentioned below. When a poet of one of the six inferior grades went on visitation, he was allowed a retinue according to his rank, who were to be entertained with him. For example, an anruth, being next to the ollave, had a company of twelve: a doss had four: and a fochluc, the lowest qualified poet, had two.‡ This remarkable custom, which is constantly mentioned in Irish writings of all kinds, existed from the most remote pagan times.

The right of poets to be entertained and paid for their poems on these occasions was universally acknowledged; and few persons had the courage to break through the custom; for it was considered disgraceful to refuse a poet his guerdon. Even the early Christian missionaries, and the Danes, and still later the Anglo-Normans, fell in with the custom. A well-marked example, occurring in the first half of the fifth century, is recorded incidentally in the ancient Lives of St. Patrick. The saint having converted the chief poet, Dubthach, asked him to recommend a man whom he might consecrate to religion. Dubthach replied that the only man he knew that was likely to answer was one of his own disciples named Fiacc: but that he was just then absent in Connaught, whither he

\* For instances of *cuairts*, or 'circuits,' and payments, see O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, I. 99, 100, 103, 129: Petrie, *Round Towers*, 354: Tromdamh, in *Trans. Oss. Soc.*, v. 11, 15, 113: Silva Gad., 420, 421.

† For these houses see vol. II. p. 166.

‡ *Br. Laws*, IV. 357, 359, 361

had been sent by Dubthach with poetry for the kings of that province. Fiacc, having returned soon after, was baptised by St. Patrick; and he became a distinguished Irish saint, well known in ecclesiastical history as St. Fiacc, bishop of Sleaty. The same Lives record another example of payment for poetry—legendary, but of equal antiquity—as occurring among the saints themselves. St. Sechnall of Dunshaughlin in Meath made a hymn in honour of his uncle St. Patrick, and on presenting it to him, demanded payment for it according to custom. There was a little huckstering between the two saints: but in the end Sechnall accepted as payment this favour:—that whoever recited the last three verses of the hymn with proper dispositions, morning and evening each day, would gain heaven in the end.\* And numerous examples might be cited where Irish poets went on visitation among the Galls or Danes, and got well paid for their poetry.†

From the fifth century—and indeed from a much earlier time—down through all periods of our history, instances could be quoted. The last poetical *cuaire* that I can find any record of, occurred in the year 1808, when a poet named O'Kelly—"The Bard O'Kelly," as he styled himself—made a circuit of Connaught, visiting the houses of the leading gentlemen to extort subscriptions, and, at the end of it, wrote a doggerel poem in English—not without vigour—of which I have a printed copy. All the families he visited are mentioned, most with praise as they gave him money, but some with scurrilous abuse because they had the spirit to refuse him.‡

**The Satire.**—The grand weapon of the poets, by which they enforced their demands, was the *áer* or satire—sometimes called *groma* (Corm. 86). A satire or lampoon is unpleasant enough under any circumstances. But an

\* Trip. Life, 385

† For instances, see Petrie, Round Towers, 353: Atkinson, Introduction to LL, 40, b, verse at top.

‡ Scott met him in Limerick in 1825 (Lockhart's Life, ed. 1900, iv., 301.)

Irish satirical verse was, I suppose, the most venomous ever invented; for it had—as the people believed—some baleful preternatural influence for inflicting mischief, physical or mental: so that it was very much dreaded. A poet could compose an *áer* that would blight crops, dry up milch-cows, raise a *ferb* or *bolg*, i.e. an ulcerous blister, on the face,\* and what was perhaps worst of all, ruin character and bring disgrace. The dread of these poetical lampoons was as intense in the time of Spenser as it was eight centuries before, as is shown by his words (View, 120):—"None dare displease them [the poets] for "feare to runne into reproach thorough their offence, and "to be made infamous in the mouthes of all men."

We have already seen (p. 240) the use of the male-dictory incantation called a *glám-dichenn* by sorcerers: this term was also applied to some at least of the extempore satires pronounced by poets—as poets and not as sorcerers. Before the second Battle of Moytura, when the various leading professional Dedannans were asked what help they could give in the battle, the *filè* or poet (as distinguished from the sorcerer, who is also named) promised, on behalf of his class, to make a *glám-dichenn* on the Fomorian enemies, which would satirise and shame them, and take away their power of resistance.† This application also appears from the following instances, in which the terms *áer* and *glám-dichenn* are used to denote the self-same satire. The two sons of Aithirne, the venomous Ulster poet, who were themselves poets, made improper proposals to Luaine, Concobar Mac Nessa's young queen, and threatened if she did not yield to make a *glám-dichenn* on her: and the legend goes on to say that on her refusal they made three *áers*‡

\* Corm. 71 ("Ferb").

† Rev. Celt., xii. 91.

‡ In YBL, 178, b, line 19, their compositions are called *glám-dichenn*; and, in line 23, *tri haera*, 'three *aers*.' See also Atkinson's Contents to same vol., p. 11. Whole story translated by Stokes, Rev. Celt. xxiv.

which raised three *bolga*, or 'blisters,' on her face; a black blister which was called *on*, or 'stain'; a red one called *ainim*, or 'blemish'; and a white one called *aithis*, or 'defect': on which the poor young queen died of grief for the disgrace. This was the crowning and last iniquity of Aithirne and his family; for the Ulstermen, urged on by Concobar, rose up in a rage and slew the whole three, and destroyed their *dun*. So also the satire made by Mac Adnai on his uncle Caeir is called in one place *áer*, in another *glám-dichenn*, and in a different copy *glám* simply.\*

Sometimes the pronouncement by a poet of a *glám-dichenn* against a king or chief who refused to pay him the just reward of his poetry was attended with curious and elaborate formalities: different indeed from those used by professed sorcerers, but hardly less pagan. It was a solemn excommunication, or rather curse, pronounced from the top of a hill by a company of seven, namely, one of each of the seven orders of poets (as named at p. 428, *supra*), of whom the aggrieved poet was one. The whole wicked process, as described in the Book of Ballymote, may be seen in O'Curry's Lectures, and a literal translation by Stokes in *Revue Celtique*.† According to a statement in an ancient MS. quoted by Stokes,‡ "the blisters would grow on the "poet (*filè*) himself, and he would straightway perish if "he satirised the guiltless." The poets who pronounced the two villainous and undeserved satires on Luaine and Caeir escaped the blisters; but they perished immediately after. A poetical *glám-dichenn* was always an extempore composition; and its name shows that the fingers were used as a mnemonic aid as in the pagan

\* Three Ir. Glossaries, Preface, xxxvi to xl: also Corm. Glossary, 57 ("Doiduine"); and 87 ("Gaire").

† O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, I. 216, 217: *Rev. Celt.*, XII. 119.

‡ In *Rev. Celt.*, XX. 422.



*dichetal do chennib* (p. 243, *supra*): for the word *dichenn* is the same in sense as *do-chennib*, meaning 'from the [finger-] ends.'

A poet could kill the lower animals by an *áer*. A story is told of Senchan Torpest, chief poet of Ireland, who lived in the seventh century, that once when his dinner was eaten in his absence by rats he uttered an *áer* on them in his ill-humour, beginning, "Rats, though sharp their snouts, are not powerful in battle," which killed ten of them on the spot.\* Hence it was believed, even down to late times, that the Irish bards could rhyme rats to death which is often alluded to by Shakespeare and other English writers of the time of Elizabeth.†

A poet praised or satirised as the occasion required: and all poets could do both. This double function was universally understood from the earliest to the latest time, and is clearly set forth by the commentator on the *Senchus Mór*,‡ when he states that one of the persons permitted to speak in public before Patrick's time was "a poet to eulogise and to satirise." And Cormac's Glossary (p. 74) is quite as clear when it derives *fili*, 'a poet,' from "*fi*, poison in satire, and *li*, splendour in praise." But some poets devoted themselves almost exclusively to the composition of the *áer*, and these came to be recognised as professional satirists. A satirist was commonly called *cáinte*; but sometimes *dul* and *rinntaidh*.§ We occasionally meet with female satirists, who were called *ban-cáinte* (*ban*, as an adjective prefix, meaning 'female').

The Brehon Law laid down a penalty for an unjust satire: the Crith Gabhlach repeatedly speaks of fines of so many *séds* for this offence||: but apparently these provisions had not much effect in restraining the violence of

\* Tromdamh, 75; and see the long and useful note beginning at 76.

† See a Paper on Rhyming Rats to Death, by Dr. Todd: Proc. Roy.

Ir. Acad., v. 355.

‡ Br. Laws, i. 19.

§ Corm. Gloss., pp. 31, 58, 141. || Br. Laws, i. 59; iv. 307, 345, 347.

the satirical poets. Cormac, in several passages of his Glossary, gives vivid expression to the hateful character the satirist bore in his time (ninth or tenth century). In one place (p. 58), the satirist is "unendurable for his harshness": in another (p. 141), "he wounds each face" [by raising blisters]: and in yet another (p. 31), *cáinte* is derived from *canis*, 'a dog,' "because the satirist has a "dog's head in barking, and alike is the profession they "follow" [snarling, barking, biting]. In a passage of the Brehon Laws (III. 25, 8), the *cáinte* or satirist is classed among people of disreputable character. In the time of Elizabeth, an Irish satirical poet named Aengus O'Daly—commonly known as *Aengus-nan-aer*, 'Aengus of the Satires,' lampooned the Irish chiefs with the intention of turning them into ridicule—hired for his vile function, as was universally believed, by Lord Mountjoy and Sir George Carew. He traversed the four provinces, and had a scurrilous verse for every chief he visited. All went well with him till he came to North Tipperary. Here, at a banquet, he uttered some scurvy remarks about O'Meagher, the chief of Ikerrin, on which one of the clan became so infuriated that he drew a *skian* or dagger and brought Aengus and his scurrility to a sudden end. Then there was a deathbed repentance; for when dying, the poet uttered one more stanza, revoking all his villainous sayings about the Irish chiefs. This poem has been translated and edited by O'Donovan,\* whose introduction gives a vast amount of information regarding Irish satires and satirists.

**General Character of Poets.**—Many authorities, among them Colgan, believe that the poets of the Christian times were the direct representatives of the druids of the old pagan ages. As bearing out this opinion, it is certain that—notwithstanding Columkille's action as related next page—the poets and the Christian ecclesiastics are often represented in our records as hostile to one another; and

\* In The Tribes of Ireland.

the ceremonies at the pronouncement—in Christian times—of a *glám-dichenn* by a poet were very pagan in character.

All people, high and low, had a sincere admiration and respect for these poets, and, so far as their means permitted, willingly entertained them and gave them presents, of which we find instances everywhere in the literature: and the law made careful provision for duly rewarding them and protecting them from injuries. But, as might be expected, they often abused their position and privileges by unreasonable demands, so that many of them, while admired for their learning, came to be feared and hated for their arrogance. Their rapacity gave rise to a well-known legend—if legend it is—recorded in Cormac's Glossary (p. 21) and elsewhere,\* that they had a "caldron of greed," called a *bógē*, made of gold or silver, weighing twelve ounces, which they carried about suspended by little chains of *findruine* from the tops of their spears. Into this every person who gave them anything put the donation.

Their oppression became so intolerable that on three several occasions in ancient times—at long intervals—the people of all classes rose up against them and insisted on their suppression. But they were saved each time by the intervention of the men of Ulster. The last occasion of these was at the convention of Drum-Ketta in the year 574, during the reign of Aed Mac Ainmirech,† when the king himself and the greater part of the kings and chiefs of Ireland determined to have the whole order suppressed, and the worst among them banished the country. But St. Columkille interposed with a more moderate and a better proposal, which was agreed to through his great influence. The poets and their followers were greatly reduced in number: strict rules were laid down for the

\* See Three Ir. Gloss., Pref. lviii: and Rev. Celt., xx. 423.

† One of the circumstances that brought on this crisis was their insolent demand of the royal wheel-brooch, for which see p. 59, *supra*.

regulation of their conduct in the future ; and those who were fit for it, especially the ollaves, were set to work to teach schools, with land for their maintenance, so as to relieve the people from their exactions. It should be remarked that at this Drum-Ketta Council, as on the two previous occasions, it was the *filè*-poets alone who were in question, not the bards.

Much has been said here about the poets that abused their privileges. These were chiefly the satirists, who were mostly men of sinister tendencies, But we should glance at the other side. At all periods of our history poets are found, of noble and dignified character, highly learned, and ever ready to exert their great influence in favour of manliness, truthfulness, and justice. To these we owe a great number of poems containing invaluable information on the history and antiquities of the country : and such men were at all times respected, loved, and honoured, as will be shown in the next section. The poets played a noble part during the Elizabethan and Williamite wars, as well as during the time of the Penal Laws. They threw themselves passionately on the side of their country ; and many of their fine patriotic poems are still extant—fiery or sad as the occasions called them forth. They exerted considerable influence in stirring up resistance : and hence they were pursued with unrelenting hostility by the Anglo-Irish Government authorities.

It should be remarked that there were poetesses also, of whom many are noticed in the literature. A historical instance occurs in the Annals of the Four Masters, who, under the date A.D. 932, record the death of “ Uallach (daughter of Muimhnechan), chief poetess (*bainécces*) of Ireland.”

**Contests of Wit.**—The Irish poets were much given to contests of wit, usually carried on in the following way. When two of them met, one repeated the first half of a verse or very short poem, which was a challenge to the other to complete it. Sometimes it was a quotation from



some obscure, half-forgotten old poem, sometimes an effusion composed on the spot, in which case the second poet was expected to give, extemporaneously, a second half of the same length, prosody, and rhyme, and making continuous sense. This practice was common among other ancient nations as well as among the Irish;\* and according to Stokes (*Acallamh*, p. 304) it still prevails in Portugal and India. In Ireland it was believed that a true poet never failed to respond correctly, so that this was a test often applied to expose a poetical pretender.

On one occasion St. Cumman repeated two lines of poetry to his half-brother Comgan (see p. 224, *supra*); on which Comgan, without a moment's hesitation, composed and repeated two lines which completed the quatrain and carried on the sense in perfect rhythm and rhyme. This is a translation of the complete quatrain, which is on the subject of smith-work.†

" CUMMAN.

" The pincers grasps the glowing iron-bar;  
Down comes the ponderous sledge with thundering sound;

" COMGAN.

" Sparkles in showers are flying near and far;  
The bellows plays a murmuring tune all round."‡

So generally cultivated, and so universally admired, was this talent for impromptu reply, that in the ecclesiastical legends some of the Irish saints are

\* See *Corm. Gloss.*, 138, Stokes's note: and *Mac Conglinne*, 136.

† *Todd's Book of Hymns*, 90. For other instances, see *Tromdamh*, 117, 119: and *Rev. Celt.*, XII. 460.

‡ In the original Irish, the second two lines correspond with the first two in rhyme and rhythm, something like the English rendering above, so that in view of the contest, a literal translation appears pointless:—

" The pincers grasps the black-red bar  
Upon which falls the ponderous sledge;

" Sparkles fly upon every side  
The bellows plays [a tune] all round."

credited with as much proficiency as the best of the poets. According to a legend in an ancient MS. referred to by O'Donovan, St. Columkille, walking once with some companions, met the devil disguised as a respectable-looking gentleman; and not knowing at first who he was, fell into conversation with him. After an agreeable chat, the gentleman challenged the saint to a trial of poetical skill, and propounded the first lines of several hard old *ranns*, or verses, which Columkille correctly completed in every case. It was now the saint's turn, and he recited some devotional half verses which puzzled and silenced Satan—who was not well versed in that sort of literature—and what was worse, showed up who he was plainly in sight of all; so that he became quite ashamed of himself, and sneaked off with his tail between his legs.\*

This practice held its ground among the Irish-speaking poets till recent times. Two poets hardly ever met without a playful contest of wit—always in Irish: and these encounters were listened to with the utmost delight by the peasantry, who to this day, in the southern counties, retain in memory many of the brilliant repartees of Owen Roe O'Sullivan, Andrew Magrath, and other witty poets of the eighteenth century.

#### 6. *Honours and Rewards for Learning.*

In many other ways besides those indicated in the preceding part of this chapter the people, both high and low, manifested their admiration for learning, and their readiness to reward its professors. From the period of myth and romance down to recent times, we trace a succession of learned men in all the professions, to whom the Irish annals accord as honoured places as they do to kings and warriors. An ollave sat next the king at

\* O'Donovan in *Corm. Gloss.*, 138, note at top.

table: he was privileged to wear the same number of colours in his clothes as the king and queen, namely six, while all other ranks had fewer. The same *dire*, or dignity-fine (p. 208, *supra*), was allowed for a king, a bishop, and an ollave poet: and they had the same joint at dinner, namely, the *larac* or haunch.\* The several grades of learned and professional men were on a level, in body-fine and social rank, with the chieftain grades. The *scr-leginn* (or *druimcli*, p. 416, *supra*), or, as he was often called, the *sai-litre*, 'doctor of literature,' ranked with the chief or king of a *tuath*: his tanist or intended successor with an *aire-ard*: the *forcellaid*, 'professor,' or 'teacher,' with the lowest rank of *aire-forgaill*: and the *staraidh* or 'historian,' with the *aire-dessa*.† We have seen that a king kept at his court an ollave of each profession, who held a very high position, and had ample stipends:‡ and once a family was selected to supply ollaves to the king they were freed from the customary tribute.§

The general tendency to honour learning is shown also by the recognised practice of kings to promote to positions of honour and trust those who had been their tutors in early life. For example, when Aed Ordnidhe [Ordnee] became king of Ireland, A.D. 797, he made his tutor—Fothad of the Canon—not only his chief poet but his trusted adviser in state affairs. And when Brian Boru came to the throne of Munster, A.D. 976, he appointed as his secretary and confidential adviser, Maelsuthain O'Carroll, a distinguished lay scholar, "chief sage of Ireland," who had been his tutor at the College of Innisfallen.|| This veneration for poets and other learned men

\* Br. Laws, I. 41, 49, 15, 16.

† Petrie, Tara, 208, note 3; Br. Laws, v. 103. For the above chieftain designations see pp. 156–159, *supra*.

‡ For a particular example of the emoluments of a court ollave, see vol. II., p. 292.

§ Hy Many, 63, in case of the Clann Aedhagain.

|| O'Curry, Man. & Cust., I. 177. See this Maelsuthain mentioned at page 504 farther on.

remained down to a late period, unaffected by wars and troubles. We read of great banquets got up on several occasions to honour the whole body of men of learning, to which all the professional men within reach—both of Ireland and Scotland—were invited. Several such banquets are commemorated in our records, and some were on a vast scale, and lasted for many days. In 1351 William Boy O'Kelly, king of Hy Many in Connaught, invited the learned men of every profession to his castle of Gallagh near Castleblayney in Galway. They came in vast numbers and were lodged in long streets of tents round the castle. Each street was set apart for one particular profession—one for poets, one for bards, one for brehons or lawyers, &c. This banquet was celebrated, and O'Kelly himself was glorified, in a poem, by his ollave *filè* Geoffrey Finn O'Daly, in which the rows of tents are aptly compared to the lines of letters in a manuscript, and the castle to a large illuminated capital.\*

The Four Masters and other annalists relate another banquet of this kind—or rather two successive banquets—given a short time before 1451 by Margaret, wife of O'Conor of Offaly and daughter of O'Carroll of Ely, a lady who is greatly praised by the Irish for her unbounded benevolence and love of learning. “The learned men of “Ireland and Scotland† were invited—poets, musicians, “brehons, antiquaries, &c. The first meeting was held in “Killeigh near Tullamore, when 2700 were present: and “the second at Rathangan in Kildare, to which were “invited all who were absent from the first. Lady “Margaret herself was present: and she sat high up in “the gallery of the church in view of the assembly, clad “in robes of gold, surrounded by her friends and by the “clergy and brehons. All were feasted in royal style,

\* See Hy Many, 104: and Annals of Clonmacn., A.D. 1351. The poem is published, with translation, in Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad., vi. 51.

† Mark the implication here of the close connexion between Ireland and Scotland. See pp. 7, 81, *supra*.



“ seated according to rank : after which each learned man  
 “ was presented with a valuable gift : and the names  
 “ of all present were entered in a roll by Gilla-na-Neeve  
 “ Mac Egan, chief brehon to O’Conor, the lady’s husband.”\*

Perhaps the most signal instance in the Irish records of the respect for learned men of high character, and of the confidence reposed in them, is the fact that on the death of the high king Malachi in 1022, as there happened to be then no claimant for the throne of Ireland, the government of the country, pending the election of a king, was placed in the hands of two eminent men, who acted as joint regents, Cuan O’Lochain, a layman, the most distinguished poet and scholar of his day, and “ Corcran the cleric ” of Lismore, “ the head of the west of Europe for piety and wisdom,” as the Four Masters style him. This event is recorded in the Book of Leinster, which was transcribed a little more than a century after the death of Corcran, in the annals of Clonmacnoise, as well as in many later authorities.† This, however, is the only recorded instance of such a devolution. But among the minor kingdoms the appointment of a regent during an interregnum must have been a usual occurrence, as we learn from the words of Cormac’s Glossary (p. 22) :—“ Every  
 “ time there is no king in the *tuaths* [or smaller kingdoms :  
 “ p. 42, *supra*], it is a *bráthchaei* [braukee] that serves on  
 “ them for administering local law.” From this we learn that a regent was called a *bráthchaei* ; and the words seem to imply that a *brehon* or judge was usually appointed to the post.

But all this respect for the poet was conditional on his observance of the rules of his order, one of which was to maintain a high personal character for dignity and integrity. The *Senchus Mór* lays down that a fraudulent

\* From Joyce’s Short Hist. of Ireland, p. 338 : see Ir. Archæol. Misc., vol. 1., p. 227 : and FM, A.D. 1451.

† LL, 26, a, 20 : Trip. Life, 525 : O’Curry, Man. & Cust., i. 137 : Ogyg., iii. xciv.

poet may be degraded, *i.e.* a poet who mixes up falsehood with his compositions, or who composes an unlawful satire, or who demands more than his due reward.\* A poet, *i.e.* one belonging to the recognised grades, was obliged, according to an ancient *rann* or verse quoted by Duaid Mac Firbis, to have

“Purity of hand, bright without wounding,  
Purity of mouth, without poisonous satire,  
Purity of learning, without reproach,  
Purity of husbandship” (*i.e.* fidelity to his marriage vows).†



FIG. 122.

\* The Colledge, Youghal, as drawn by Dinely, time of Charles II. Founded and richly endowed by Thomas Fitzgerald, the Great Earl of Desmond, in the fifteenth century. An example of the Anglo-Normans' encouragement of learning. (See Joyce, *Short Hist. of Ireland*, 341, 342. From *Kilk. Arch. Journ.* for 1862-3. p. 323.)

The Anglo-Norman lords, after they had settled down in Ireland, became as zealous encouragers of Gaelic learning as the native nobility, “so that the Geraldines, the Butlers, the Burkes, the Keatings, and others, spoke, thought, and wrote in the Gaedhlic, and stored their libraries with choice and expensive volumes in that language.”‡ They kept moreover in their service ollaves of every profession, brehons, physicians, &c., and remunerated them in princely style like the native chiefs; and they often founded or endowed colleges.

\* Br. Laws, I. 55. 59.

† O'Curry, MS. Mat., 220.

‡ O'Curry, MS. Mat., 6.

### 7. *The Knowledge of Science.*

The pure and physical sciences, so far as they were known in the middle ages, were taught in the schools and colleges of Ireland. We have seen (p. 435) that the professors of the fifth grade had to master arithmetic and astronomy, which in fact meant the whole circle of science. These, of course, they taught to their pupils; and more advanced scientific studies were followed up by the two grades above them. The success of the home teaching appears plain from the distinction gained by several Irishmen on the Continent for their knowledge of astronomy, as will be pointed out farther on: knowledge not acquired abroad, but brought from their native schools.

The Irish scholars understood astronomy according to the Ptolemaic system, which they universally adopted. Of this knowledge many indications appear in the ancient literature; and we have still several ancient treatises in the Irish language, well illustrated with astronomical diagrams; though they appear to have been in considerable measure copied or translated from foreign treatises. In the first poem of the *Saltair-na-Rann*, written probably about A.D. 1000, is an account of the creation of the world, with a short description of the universe, showing a knowledge of the theories—some right, some wrong—then prevalent. The earth is stated to be “like an apple, goodly, truly round.” The names of the seven planets are given (“*Saturn, Joib, Mercur, Mars, Sol, Uenrr, Luna*”); the distances of the moon, the sun, and the firmament, from the earth: the firmament is round the earth as the shell is round the egg: the signs of the zodiac with their names in order, and the correct month and day when the sun enters each: the sun is 30 days 10½ hours in each sign: the five zones—north and south frigid, and two temperate, with

the torrid zone between. Then follows a statement of five things which every intelligent person should know—the day of the solar month, the age of the moon, the [time of the] flow of the tide, the day of the week, and the chief saints' festival days. In the commentary on the *Senchus Mór* is a similar description of the universe.\*

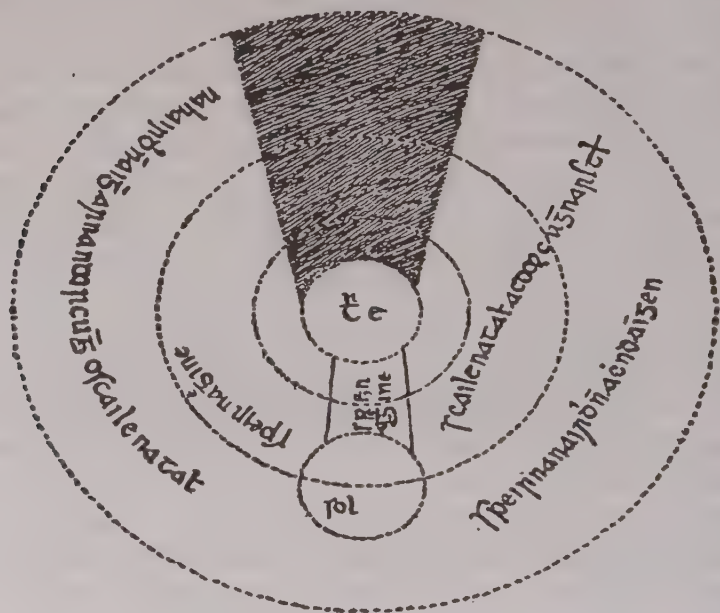


FIG. 123.

Facsimile (by hand) of a diagram in an astronomical tract (about A.D. 1400) in the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin. (The same diagram is given in coloured photograph in O'Curry's MS. Mat.: Facsimile GG at the end.) The following are the explanatory notes on the diagram, beginning at the left, with the Irish contracted words lengthened out:—

*Na h-áiríochtaí ar na ndorcnagadh o scéile na talman,* 'the high stars, on being darkened by the shadow of the earth.'

*Spéir na gréine,* 'the sphere of the sun.'

*Spéir na gréine,* 'the sphere of the sun.'

*Scéile na talman ar dorchgadh na rebe,* 'the shadow of the earth darkening the moon.'

*Spéir na n-ardreinnach n-daingen,* 'the sphere of the fixed stars.'

*Táirne,* i.e., *terra*, 'the earth' (on the middle small circle).

*Sol,* 'the sun.'

(See MS. Mat., 657.)

The various astronomical cycles were perfectly understood and were familiarly applied to calculations in connexion with chronology and the calendar. Among many ancient Irish writers who have dealt with these matters may be mentioned Augustin, already referred to

Br. Laws, i. 27.



(p. 345), who wrote his Essay on the wonders of the Bible, while residing at Carthage. Treating of Joshua's miracle of the sun and moon, he brings in the lunar cycle, 19, the solar cycle, 28, and the great cycle combining both,  $28 \times 19 = 532$ . He says that the tenth great cycle ended A.D. 120, and the eleventh in his own time:  $120 + 532 = 652$ . He remarks incidentally that in this year, 652, Manichæus the Wise—a well-known and distinguished Irish ecclesiastic—died in Ireland: a statement that agrees exactly with the Irish home records, one of the remarkable testimonies to their truthfulness (see p. 516, *infra*). He adds that the year in which he was writing was the third year of the twelfth great cycle; which enables us to fix the correct date, A.D. 655.\*

The Irish writers were well acquainted with the solstices, which they called by the descriptive native Irish name *grien-tairisem*—so given in the eighth or ninth century gloss in Zeuss (10, 16)—meaning 'sun-standing.' In the annotations to the Feilire of Aengus (p. 106, 11), it is correctly stated that one *grian-tairisem* occurs on the 21st June. They had a native name for the autumnal equinox (21st September) which was descriptive and scientifically correct: *Deiseabhair na grene* [Deshoorna-grena], literally the 'southing or going south by the sun' [*i.e.* going south of the equinoctial], from *deis*, 'south.' In the Life of St. Senan in the Book of Lismore, we read that at the time of his birth, his mother happened to be alone in the garden *fria deiseabhair na grene*† ('about the autumnal equinox'), or, as Colgan translates it, "tempore authumnali": and as making the meaning still clearer, it is said, a few lines farther on in the Life, that Senan was born *i tus fhoghamhair*, 'in the beginning of Foghamhar'; Foghamhar here meaning, not 'autumn,' its usual signification, but 'the last month of autumn,' *i.e.*

\* Reeves in Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad., VII. 516.

† Stokes, Lives of SS., line 1885, and Pref. ciii.

October (Corm. 74) : so that the two entries agree. I do not know if there was a corresponding term for the vernal equinox. All this shows that they understood the apparent annual motion of the sun along the ecliptic, half the year north, and the other half south of the equinoctial, and that at the autumnal equinox it enters on the south part of its course. So also, the real movement of the moon, and the apparent motion of the sun, round the earth—both from west to east—were well understood, as appears from a remark of one of the scholiasts on Dallan's "Amra on Columkille," that "the moon is before the sun from the first to the fifteenth [of the moon's age], and after the sun from the fifteenth to the first,"\* a perfectly correct statement.†

A small collection of Irish glosses, first published by M. D'Arbois de Jubainville—found by him on a single leaf inside the cover of a manuscript in the library of Nancy—and interpreted by M. Henri Gaidoz,‡ shows how carefully the ancient Irish studied chronology and the astronomical phenomena that determined the several cycles and dates. This collection has been assigned by De Jubainville to the ninth century. The following are the interpretations of M. Gaidoz, from which it appears that the entries formed a sort of Table of Contents to a Treatise on the Calendar :—

"To ascertain what is the day of the week on which are the calends of January."

"To ascertain what is the age of the moon on the calends of January."

"To ascertain the epact on the calends of [each of] the twelve months."

"To ascertain the age of the moon on the 11th day of the calends of April, through the year of the Incarnation."

There are two others, which are imperfect, and need not be quoted. See also, Stokes and Strachan, *Thes.* II. 41.

\* Rev. Celt., xx. 259.

† Old Irish, *re esca*, and *luan*, the moon : modern, *gealach*, meaning 'whitish.'

‡ In Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad., x. 70.

Irish scholars understood the use and construction of the sundial, for which two words were used, *solam*, which is a native term, and *soiler*, which is borrowed and shortened from the Latin *solarium*, 'a sundial.' *Soiler* explains *solarium* in the Glosses on Latin Declension, edited by Stokes (p. 91, No. 740) : while in Zeuss (771, 15) the same word *solarium* is glossed by *solam*. Besides this there is a small Irish ms. book in the monastery of St. Gall in Switzerland, written by some scholarly Irish monk residing there in the eighth century, containing remarks on various scientific subjects, such as the Oriental Cycle, the age of the world ; and among others on the sundial.\* All this shows that with these old Irish writers the sundial was a familiar object.

Virgil or Virgilius, abbot of Aghaboe in the present Queen's County, who went to the Continent A.D. 745, and became bishop of Salzburg, was one of the most advanced scholars of his day. Pepin, Mayor of the Palace, subsequently king of France, became greatly attached to him, and kept him in the palace for two years. Virgil taught publicly—and was probably the first to teach—that the earth was round, and that people lived at the opposite side—at the Antipodes. His Irish name was *Fergil*, which, in a modified form, is common in Ireland to this day (O'Farrell) : and he is commonly known in history as Fergil the Geometer.†

We have a remarkable testimony to the reputation of Irishmen on the Continent for secular and other learning in those early ages, in the well-known letter written to Charlemagne by the Irish monk Dungal, which came about in this way. It having been stated that two solar eclipses had occurred in one year, A.D. 810, the emperor selected Dungal, who happened to be then in France,

\* Keller, in *Ulst. Journ. Archæol.*, VIII. 294.

† For an account of this great scholar, see Lanigan, *Eccl. Hist.*, "Virgilius," in Index.

living a recluse life, as the scholar considered best able to explain such an unusual occurrence, and requested him to do so. Dungal's reply ("The Epistle of Dungal the recluse to Charlemagne, regarding two solar eclipses, "A.D. 810") is still extant, about which we may quote the appropriate words of Thomas Moore\* :—"However superficial the astronomical knowledge displayed in this short tract, the writer has proved himself to have been well acquainted with all that the ancients had said on the subject; while both in his admission that two solar eclipses might take place within the year, and his doubt that such a rare incident had occurred in 810, he is equally correct." The letter also shows that he knew of the inclination of the plane of the moon's orbit to that of the ecliptic; and he sets forth the astronomical principle that for an eclipse—whether of sun or moon—to occur, it is necessary that the moon should be in the plane of the ecliptic. This Dungal subsequently resided in Italy, where he became a celebrated teacher, drawing pupils from all the surrounding cities; and he also wrote learnedly on ecclesiastical subjects.†

The remarkable work on geography, "De Mensura Orbis Terrarum," written by the Irish scholar and traveller Dicuil, of which several editions were published in the eighteenth century by German and French editors, has been already mentioned (p. 345, *supra*).

When learning had declined in England in the ninth and tenth centuries,‡ owing to the devastations of the Danes, it was chiefly by Irish teachers it was kept alive and restored. In Glastonbury especially, they taught with great success; and we are told by many English writers--

\* Moore, Hist. of Irel., i. 295.

† See Lanigan, III. 256 to 262: and Dr. Healy, Irel. Anc. Schools, 383.

‡ We are told by several English authorities that at this time (tenth century) a priest could not be found there who could translate or write a letter in Latin (Lanigan, III. 395).



among them Osbern, the author of a Life of St. Dunstan—that “they were skilled in every department of learning, sacred and profane”; and that under them were educated many young English nobles, sent to Glastonbury with that object. Among these students the most distinguished was St. Dunstan, who, according to all his biographers, received his education, both scriptural and secular, from Irish masters there. One writer of his Life, William of Malmesbury, states that Dunstan studied diligently arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music, under Irish teachers, and adds that these sciences were held in great esteem and were much cultivated by them.\*

The age of the moon (*æes éscæ*) is mentioned in Cormac's Glossary, as well as in many other ancient authorities, as a matter quite familiar: so much so that—as already remarked (p. 465)—every well-informed person was supposed to know the moon's age for each day, and of course the method of calculating it. Even the general mass of intelligent people made use of simple astronomical observations in daily life. Cuculainn, sitting at a feast says to his attendant:—“Go out, my friend Loeg, observe the stars of the air, and ascertain when midnight comes” [when Cuculainn would have to leave]. And Loeg did so, and came back at the proper moment to announce that it was midnight.† This record shows that all intelligent people of those times could roughly estimate the hour of night throughout the year by the position of the stars—as indeed I have known intelligent peasants of my own time able to do: a sort of observation not at all simple, inasmuch as the positions of the stars at given hours change from month to month.

These are a few illustrations—scattered and fragmentary indeed—of the eminence of ancient Irish scholars in science. But the materials for final judgment are not

\* Keller, in *Ulst. Journ. Archæol.*, viii. 218. See also, on all this, Lanigan, *Eccl. Hist.*, iii. 395.

† Mesca Ulad, 13.

yet available: they are still hidden away in manuscripts among libraries all over Europe. When they are fully brought to light, then, and not till then, we shall be able to accord something approaching the full meed of justice to the learned men of ancient Ireland.

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## CHAPTER XII

### IRISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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#### SECTION I. *Divisions and Dialects of Celtic.*



**ix Dialects.**—There are **two** main branches of the ancient Celtic language:—The **Goidelic**, or Gaelic, or Irish; and the **British**; corresponding with the two main divisions of the Celtic people of the British Islands. Each of these has branched into three dialects.

Those of Gaelic are:—The Irish proper, spoken in Ireland; the Gaelic of Scotland, differing only slightly from Irish; and the Manx, which may be said to be Irish written phonetically with some dialectical variations. The dialects of British are:—Welsh, spoken in Wales; Cornish, spoken till lately in Cornwall; and Breton or Armoric, spoken in Brittany. The dialects of British differ among themselves much more than do those of Goidelic: they should indeed be reckoned rather distinct languages than dialects, though Zeuss includes all three under the designation “Britannic.” Their wide divergence as compared with the dialects of Goidelic is explained by the fact that Welsh, Cornish, and Armoric flowed independently from the common source very far back in time, while both the Manx and

the Scotch Gaelic branched off from Irish Gaelic at a comparatively late period. Of the whole six dialects, five are still spoken; the Cornish became extinct in the eighteenth century; and Manx is nearly extinct. Four have an ancient written literature:—**Irish, Welsh, Cornish, and Armoric.** Neither the Gaelic of Scotland nor the Manx has an ancient literature distinct from that of Ireland:\* but Scotland has a living modern literature.† All these are derived from the Gaulish or Continental Celtic, which in the course of ages, since the separation of the original Gaulish emigrant tribes, has diverged into the two branches and the six dialects named here.

**Three Divisions of Irish.**—Irish, like all other living languages, has undergone great changes in lapse of time: so that in fact the written language of eleven or twelve hundred years ago, of which many specimens have been preserved, is now all but unintelligible to those who can read only modern Irish. The changes are:—In *vocabulary*; in *spelling*; and in *inflections*. Numberless words have dropped out of use, while others have been introduced, chiefly from other languages: many of the words have changed their spelling: and some of the old inflections have been dropped and their places supplied, either by other inflectional forms or more commonly by prepositions and auxiliaries, so as to render the language more analytic, as in the case of English.

It is usual to divide Irish, as we find it written, into

\* As illustrating this statement:—The countless Gaelic passages and words quoted by Zeuss throughout his *Grammatica Celtica* from manuscripts written in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, are all, without exception, marked by him—what they really are—"Hibernian."

† For modern Scottish Gaelic literature, see Maclean's *Literature of the Celts*. chap. xiv. *st seq.* Modern Irish Gaelic literature is very fully treated of in Dr. Hyde's *Literary Hist. of Irel.* In Ireland a vigorous attempt is just now being made to re-create a living written Gaelic literature, and to extend the use of the spoken Irish language. There is a movement also—following the example of Ireland—to revive Manx and Cornish.

three stages. **I. Old Irish**, from the seventh or eighth to the eleventh or twelfth century. This is the language of the Glosses, of the Irish found in the Book of Armagh, and of some passages in the Book of the Dun Cow ; but we have very little Old Irish preserved in Ireland. The classical age of the language was while the Old Irish prevailed. According to Zeuss the written language gradually changed from the eleventh century onwards. The oldest, purest, and most cultivated form, as found in the St. Gall and other seventh or eighth century glosses, was called the *Bérta féne* [bairla faina], *i.e.* the language of the *Feini* or main body of the free original inhabitants (for whom see p. 160, *supra*).\* After the Anglo-Norman invasion, the native language, like the native arts, degenerated ; and it gradually lost its pure grammatical forms and its classical precision and simplicity.

**II. Middle Irish**, from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, marked by many departures from the Old Irish forms. This is the language of most of our present important manuscripts—described farther on (p. 492)—such as the Book of the Dun Cow, the Book of Leinster, the Lebar Brecc, and the Book of Ballymote.

**III. Modern Irish**, from the fifteenth century to the present day. This is the language of most of the Ossianic tales. The purest specimens are the writings of Keating, both historical and religious. There is a vast amount of manuscript literature in Modern Irish.

**Glosses.**—When transcribing or using the classics, or the Latin version of the Scriptures, Irish professors and teachers of the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, in order to aid the Irish learners, or for their own convenience, often wrote between the lines or on the margin, literal Irish translations of the unusual or most difficult words of the text, or general renderings of the sense into Gaelic phrases. These are what are called Glosses.

\* Gram. Celt., Pref. xxiv. bottom ; xxv, 21 ; xxvi, 4.



Numbers of these interesting manuscripts, their pages all crowded with glosses, are preserved to this day in many Continental libraries, mostly written in Ireland, and brought away to save them from destruction (see p. 489, *infra*)—but some written on the Continent: and in them are found older forms of Irish than any we have in Ireland. Many have been recently published, with the Latin words and passages, and the corresponding Gaelic. Similar glosses in Welsh, Breton, and Cornish are also found; but I am concerned here with Irish only. It is chiefly by means of these glosses that the ancient grammatical forms of the language have been recovered; and the meanings of numbers of Irish words, long obsolete, have been ascertained from their Latin equivalents.

It is interesting to observe that here the original intention is reversed. The scribe wrote the Gaelic, which was the language of his everyday life, to explain the Latin text. But while the Latin, being then, as now, a dead language, has remained unchanged, the Gaelic has suffered all those changes spoken of in page 472, so that the Gaelic of the glosses is now in many cases difficult and obscure. Accordingly, instead of the Gaelic explaining the Latin, we now use the Latin to explain the Gaelic.

**Zeuss.** The first to make extensive use of the glosses for these purposes was Johann Kaspar Zeuss, a Bavarian; born 1806; died 1856. He had a great talent for languages, and began the study of the Celtic dialects about 1840. Thenceforward he laboured incessantly, visiting the libraries of St. Gall, Wurzburg, Milan, Carlsruhe, Cambrai, and several other cities, in all of which there are manuscript books with glosses in the Celtic dialects; and he copied everything that suited his purpose. He found the Irish glosses by far the most ancient, extensive, and important of all. Most of them belonged to the seventh or eighth century; some few to the beginning of the ninth. At the

end of thirteen years he produced the great work of his life, "*Grammatica Celtica*," a complete Grammar of the four ancient Celtic dialects—Irish or Gaelic, and the three British dialects, Welsh, Cornish, and Armoric: published 1853. It is a closely printed book of over 1000 pages; and it is all written in Latin, except of course the Celtic examples and quotations. Each of the four dialects is treated of separately. In this work he proves that the Celtic people of the British Islands are the same with the Celtæ of the Continent; and that Celtic is one of the branches of the Aryan or Indo-European languages, abreast with Latin, Greek, the Teutonic languages, Sanscrit, &c. After his death a second edition, with much valuable additional matter, was brought out by another eminent German Celtic scholar, H. Ebel.

Zeuss was the founder of Celtic philology. The "*Grammatica Celtica*" was a revelation to scholars, wholly unexpected; and it gave an impetus to the study, which has been rather increasing than diminishing since his time. He made it plain that a knowledge of the Celtic languages is necessary in order to unravel the early history of the peoples of Western Europe. Since the time of Zeuss, many scholarly works have been written on Celtic philology: but the "*Grammatica Celtica*" still stands at the head of all.

**Ancient Glossaries and Grammars.**—In consequence of the gradual change of the Irish language it became customary for native scholars of past times, skilled in the ancient language, to write glossaries of obsolete words to aid students in reading very ancient manuscripts. Many of these are preserved in our old books. The most noted is "*Cormac's Glossary*," ascribed to Archbishop Cormac Mac Cullenan, king of Cashel, who died A.D. 908. It was translated and annotated by John O'Donovan; and this translation and the Irish text, with most valuable additional notes, have been published by

Dr. Whitley Stokes.\* Michael O'Clery, the chief of the Four Masters, printed and published at Louvain, in 1643, a Glossary of ancient and difficult Irish words, which has been edited and re-published by Mr. W. K. Miller in vols. iv. and v. of the *Revue Celtique*. "Three Irish Glossaries," edited by Dr. Stokes, with learned and instructive introduction, contains those of Cormac and O'Davoren, and a third, namely, a Glossary to the *Feilire* of Oengus, all without translation (but Cormac's Glossary, as stated above, has been translated in a separate volume). Mac Firis and his master O'Davoren compiled Glossaries of the Brehon laws, which are still extant; and there are, in Trinity College, copies made by Mac Firis of several other glossaries. There is a very ancient treatise on Irish Grammar, divided into four books, ascribed severally to four learned Irishmen. Of these the latest was Kennfaela the Learned, who lived in the seventh century, and who is set down as the author of the fourth book (see pp. 483 and 620, below). Copies of this tract are found in the Books of Ballymote and Lecan; but it has never been translated.

But with all the aids at our command—glossaries, glosses, translations, and commentaries—there are many Irish pieces in the books named below (p. 492) that have up to the present defied the attempts of the best Irish

\* NOTE ON CORMAC'S GLOSSARY.—In the Book of Leinster, and by universal tradition, this Glossary is attributed to Archbishop Cormac Mac Cullenan, king of Munster, who died A.D. 908. Dr. Whitley Stokes considers the evidence insufficient to prove him the author; but says:—"The proofs adduced . . . sufficiently show that the greater part of what is commonly called Cormac's Glossary was written, if not in the time of Cormac, at least within a century or so after his death" (*Three Irish Glossaries*, Pref. xviii). On this point we must bear in mind that the entry in the Book of Leinster transmits a tradition that was old in 1160, when the book was written: and, coupling this with the universal belief expressed in our oldest writings—independently of the Book of Leinster—it seems to me that we may accept the testimony in favour of Cormac's authorship. It will, I think, be found that many ancient classical and other texts are attributed to certain authors on evidence not more satisfactory. I give these observations for what they are worth. I naturally feel that one ought to be cautious in questioning the opinion of Dr. Stokes in such a matter as this.

scholars to translate them satisfactorily, so many old words, phrases, and allusions do they contain whose meanings have been lost. This state of things has been caused chiefly by the wholesale destruction of MSS. mentioned at page 489, *infra*, which left great gaps, and broke the continuity of the Irish language and literature. The poetry is much more intractable than the prose, for reasons that will be explained farther on. But the subject is attracting more and more attention as years go by ; so that now it may be said that the language, literature, and antiquities of Ireland—and of the Celtic nations in general—excite almost as keen an interest throughout Europe as those of Egypt and Assyria. Great numbers of Continental scholars as well as those of the British Isles are eagerly engaged in studying ancient Irish texts ; year by year the difficulties are being overcome ; and there is every hope that before long we shall have translations of most or all of these obscure old pieces.\*

## 2. *Writing and Writing Materials.*

**Scribes.**—After the time of St. Patrick, as everything seems to have been written down that was considered worth preserving, manuscripts accumulated in the course of time, which were kept in monasteries and in the houses of hereditary professors of learning : many also in the libraries of private persons. As there were no printed books, readers had to depend for a supply entirely on manuscript copies. To copy a book was justly considered a very meritorious work, and in the highest degree so if it was a part of the Holy Scriptures, or of any other book on

\* A very useful epitome of the present state of knowledge regarding ancient Irish literature is given by M. Dottin in his article " La Littérature Gaélique de l'Irlande," in the *Revue de Synthèse Historique* for 1901, p. 60. Dr. Maclean has given, in the last chap. of his *Literature of the Celts*, a good account of the most distinguished modern workers in Celtic lore—" the Master Scholars of Celtic Literature," as he calls them—German, French, Italian, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, American, English, Welsh, Manx, Scotch, Irish ; and of the various periodicals devoted to Celtic studies.



sacred or devotional subjects. Scribes or copyists were therefore much honoured; and the annalists, after mentioning a man otherwise learned and eminent—whether bishop, priest, or lay professor—considered it an enhancement to his dignity if they were able to add that he was a scribe. In the decrees of some of the Irish synods the same punishments are ordained for those who kill or injure a bishop, an abbot, or a scribe.\* One of the merits of St. Columkille was his diligence in writing. The Four Masters mention sixty-one eminent scribes before the year 900, forty of whom lived between the years 700 and 800†—one of the indications that show the importance attached to their office and how highly they were esteemed.

There was at least one special scribe in every important monastery, who was selected partly for his scholarship and partly for his skill in penmanship. These men, outside their necessary religious duties and functions, devoted their whole time to copying and multiplying books. But besides those specially appointed to this work, the other monks often employed themselves—like Columkille—in copying, when they could withdraw from their own duties. Scribes, were very careful to test the correctness of their transcript, especially if it was Scripture. Adamnan (p. 53) relates that Baithen, one of the monks of Iona, when he had finished copying a psalter, asked Columba to let one of the brethren look over it with him, to discover errors if any: and accordingly the whole copy was read through; but only one single letter was found to be wrong.

**Vellum.**—Two chief materials were used in Ireland for writing on:—Long, thin, smooth rectangular boards or tablets; and vellum or parchment, made from the skins of sheep, goats or calves,‡ which was the most usual and the most important material. Inscriptions were also carved

\* Mac Carthy, *Textual Studies*, 205, note §: Stokes, *Trip. Life*, clxxiv.

† Miss Stokes, *Early Christian Art*, 10.

‡ See *Corm. Gloss.*, p. 40 ("Cairt").

on stone, both in ordinary Irish letters and in Ogham. The scribes had to make all their own materials—tablets, vellum, ink, and pens: or rather perhaps certain individuals devoted themselves to this special work, who thereby became skilful and expert.

**Ink** (Irish *dub* or *dubh*, i.e. 'black': pron. *dhuv*). The ink was made from carbon, without iron or any other mineral, as is shown by delicate chemical analysis. In the more ancient MSS., a thick kind of ink was used remarkable for its intense blackness and durability: and its excellence is proved by the fact that in most of the very old books the writing is almost or altogether as black as it was when written, more than a thousand years ago. "The writing in the Book of Armagh"—says Reeves (Adamn. 359, note *l*)—"after 1050 years, is as black as if executed but yesterday."

The ink was kept in a little vessel commonly made of part of a cow's horn, and therefore called *adarcín* or *adircín* [ey-arkeen], meaning 'little horn,' from *adarc* [ey-ark], 'a horn.' Once, as we read in an Irish Life of St. Columkille,\* an awkward fellow came into the saint's little hut, and knocked over the *adircín* and spilled the ink. The same incident is told in Adamnan's Latin Life, in which the ink-vessel is called *corniculum*, 'little horn,' the exact equivalent of *adircín*.†

**Pen.**—The beauty, neatness, and perfect uniformity of the handwriting in old Irish MSS., have led some English antiquaries to express an opinion that the scribes used metallic pens: but this opinion is quite untenable. Keller holds, and indeed shows, that their pens were made from the quills of geese, swans, crows, and other birds: and in this he is followed by Miss Stokes.‡ The correctness

\* Stokes, Three Ir. Homilies, 121.

† For ink and inkhorn, see Keller, in Ulst. Journ. of Archæol., VIII. 221: Miss Stokes, Early Christian Art, p. 8: and Adamn., 359, note *l*.

‡ Ulst. Journ. of Archæol., VIII. 222: Miss Stokes, Early Christian Art, 9.

of this contention is proved by some pictures in Irish manuscripts, as, for instance, in the representation of St. John in the Book of Kells,\* where the evangelist engaged in writing his Gospel holds in his hand a pen, the feather of which can be clearly perceived. The inkstand is also represented as a simple slender conical cup [*adarcín*] fastened either to the arm of the chair, or upon a small stick on the ground. There is a legend in the Irish Life of St. Molaise of Devenish which goes to confirm all this: it is in a late manuscript (sixteenth century), which was no doubt compiled from much earlier authorities. Here we read that on one occasion the saint was desirous of copying something out of a book, but at the moment had no pen: just then a flock of birds flew over his head, and one of them dropped a quill (*cite*, pron. etta), which Molaise made into a pen and wrote out his copy.† The knife with which they cut the quill pens is shown in one of the eighth-century glossed mss. from which Zeuss drew the materials for his "Grammatica Celtica," where is seen a figure of St. Matthew the Evangelist writing in a book which lies in front of him, and holding in his left hand a sort of penknife.‡

**Support for MS.**—The old scribes sometimes wrote with the book resting on the knees, having a smooth board for support. Duald Mac Firbis, writing in the year 1650, says of the history written by the ancient Irish scribes that it "was written on their knees in books," which were preserved in his time in libraries.§ But when the writing was to be elaborate or ornamental, a desk was used, and if necessary a maulstick to support the wrist, as shown in fig. 124.

**Wooden Tablets.**—The other materials for writing on are called by various names:—*Taibhli filidh* [tavila-filla], 'tablets of the poets'; *tabhall lorga*, 'tablet staves' (*lorg*,

\* Abbott, Reproductions, Pl. xxxiv.

† Silva Gad., 23.

‡ Miss Stokes, Early Christian Art, 38.

§ O'Curry, MS. Mat., 217.

'a staff'); *tamlorga filidh*, 'staves of the poets'; and *flesc filidh*, the 'poets' rod.' Of the first two names, the first part in each case is derived from the Latin *tabula* or *tabella*, a 'table,' or 'tablet': but the other two, *tamlorga filidh* and *flesc filidh*, are pure Irish. These tablets were generally made of beech or birch: but sometimes other



FIG. 124.

Scribe writing: from an illuminated manuscript copy of Giraldus Cambrensis, written about A.D. 1200; now in British Museum. Underneath is the inscription—"The Scribe writing the marvellous Kildare Gospels." Photographed from reproduction in Gilbert's Facsim. Nat. MSS., and reproduced here correctly from the photograph.

N.B.—The reproduction of this figure in Wilde's Catalogue (p. 312) is a vile caricature; for which Wilde is not to blame: he merely reproduced the *copy* supplied to him, without being aware of its gross and intentional inaccuracy.

timber was used.\* In the tale of *Bailè* and *Aillinn*, it is related that when the two trees, a yew and an appletree, that grew over the lovers' graves were cut down, they were made into *taibhli filidh*, on which the poets wrote

\* See O'Flaherty, *Ogyg.*, Part III., chap. xxx.: and Adamn., 358, 441 ("Ceraculum"), and 454 ("Tabula").



the sad history of the youth and maiden. In the story of the Colloquy of the Ancients, King Dermot directs that the lore told by the old man Cailte should be "written on *tabhlorga filidh* in the language of the ollave": which was done. Several of these were commonly bound up together: and O'Curry conjectures they were kept in the form of a fan, held together by a pivot at one end, so that they could be opened out or closed up conveniently.\* The characters were either written in ink or cut in with a knife. Ogham, which consists of lines or notches, was often cut in. The use of tablets for writing on was not peculiar to the Irish: for it is well known that, before parchment came into general use, the Romans, the Jews, and other ancient nations inscribed their laws, poems, &c., on wooden tablets.†

The writing-tablets used by ecclesiastics, which must have been similar to the *taibhli filidh*, were commonly known by the name of *pólaire* (3-syll.), a term used collectively to denote a number of single staves. This word is derived from the Latin *pugillaris* (the *g* being aspirated), which means much the same thing—a writing-tablet.‡ These tablets, when not in use, were kept in a bundle tied up with leather straps. During Palladius's brief visit to the east coast of Ireland, he founded three churches, in one of which, Cell-Fine (now Killeen Cormac, for which see p. 315, *supra*), he left several relics, among them his *pallere* or "tablets on which he used to write." Several of the old writers derive this word—no doubt wrongly—from his name; for they say it means "Palladius's burden" (Irish *ere*, 'a burden'): as if shortened from *Pallad-ere*.§

Sometimes this tablet-writing was in ink; but more

\* O'Curry, MS. Mat., 464, 465, 471, 473.

† Ware, Antiqq., 19: O'Flaherty, Ogyg., III. xxx.

‡ Trip. Life, 46, 33; 344, 22.

§ Todd, St. Patk., 294, 297, 509: Trip. Life, p. 31.

commonly the surface was covered with wax, which was written on with a metallic style: hence these tablets are called *ceraculum* (from *cera*, 'wax') in the Latin Lives of the Irish saints. This custom of writing on waxed tablets with a style is often mentioned in the Lives of the Saints, both Latin and Irish, as well as in the lay literature. In the copy of the Uraicept in the Book of Lecan, the following derivation of the Irish word *littera* ('letters') is given:—" *Littera*, from *litura*, i.e. from the smoothing or "rubbing the ancients used to put on old waxed tablets [to "make them again smooth and fit for writing on]: for it is "on these they first wrote."\* In a story about St. Ciaran in his Irish Life, he is represented as writing on his waxed tablets, which are called in one place *pólaire-Chiarain* (Ciaran's tablets), while in two other places the whole collection of tablets is called *leabhar*, i.e. a book.†

We may conclude that waxed tablets were used for temporary purposes, such as taking notes of a sermon, or other such memorandums. They were employed also by schoolmasters in old times for teaching their scholars the elements of reading. Adamnan, in the seventh century, mentions that he inscribed certain writings at first (temporarily) on waxed tablets, and afterwards on vellum.‡ This temporary use is also implied in the full story referred to above about St. Ciaran's *pólaire*. For short temporary notes, a slate and pencil were also used, as they are at the present day, of which we have an example in the story of Cinnfaela the Learned. When he was at the College of Tuaim Dreacain (now Tomregan in Cavan), what he heard by day he wrote down roughly on slates and tablets (*a leacaib ocus i taiblib*); but at night he transcribed the entries into a vellum book.§ All literary matter intended to be permanent was written on vellum or parchment.

\* Kilk. Arch. Journ., 1868, 303.

† Stokes, Lives of SS., 266.

‡ Adamn., Pref. lviii.

§ Br. Laws, III. 89.

I am not aware that any of the poets' staves—the *taibhle filidh*—have been preserved; though Duald Mac Firbis had a number of them in the seventeenth century.\* But a "book" of waxed tablets, with the writing still quite plain, was found under the surface near Maghera and presented to the Royal Irish Academy in 1845. Dr. Todd, who wrote a paper on this book, proves that the use of waxed tablets continued till the seventeenth century.†

The records show that the tablet-staves, of whatever kind, were long and narrow: hence they are called in the "Fair of Carman" by the appropriate name of *slisnige* [*slishnee*], the plural form of *slisnech*, a long narrow slit or board‡ (derived from the simple word *slis*, a narrow slit or thin board, cognate with Eng. *slice*). This is further borne out by a circumstance related in Muirchu's Memoir of St. Patrick.§ Once the saint and his companions, with their writing-tablets in their hands (*cum tabulis in manibus scriptis*), approached a group of the pagans of Connaught, who mistook, or pretended to mistake, the tablets for swords, so that they cried out that the visitors should be killed, as they came with swords in their hands to shed people's blood. This circumstance proves that they were of considerable length; which is also shown, for the poets' staves, by a regulation laid down in the Brehon Law, that a poet might use his *tabhall-lorg* to defend himself against wicked dogs.||

Petrie ("R. Towers," 336, 337) has shown that the word *pólaire*—to use his own words—"was applied, at least in later times, to a satchel (*tiag*) for books"; and he quotes a passage from an old Trinity College manuscript, in which *pólaire* is explained *tiag liubair*, that is, "a book satchel." But the general meaning of the word was

\* Ogyg., III. xxx.

† Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad., III. 99.

‡ O'Curry, Man. & Cust., II. 542, v. 58.

§ Trip. Life, 300.

|| O'Curry, MS. Mat., 471.

unquestionably 'tablets': and that the *pólaire* and *tiag* were ordinarily different things is clearly shown by the following passage from the Irish Life of St. Columkille, in which they are distinguished: "For it was his" [Columba's] wont to make crosses and *tablets* and "*satchels* (*pólaire ocus tiaga*) for books, and all church "gear": and again it is stated in the same place that he blessed "a hundred *pólaire* with a hundred crosiers and a hundred *tiaga* or satchels."\* For more about book-satchels, see next page.

**Style.**—When writing on a waxed tablet, they used a *graib* or *graiſ*, i.e. *graphium*, a sharp-pointed style of metal. which, when not in use, was commonly kept fastened in a loop or flap fixed on the sleeve or on the front of the cloak. One day, while St. Columkille was writing in his hut, he heard the noise of battle in the air: it was St. Maidoc fighting with some demons to rescue the soul of King Branduff which they were carrying off. Sticking the *graib* into his cloak, he rushed out to help Maidoc: and it is pleasant to record that the two saints overcame the demons, and sent the poor soul straight up to heaven.† When St. Patrick was in the act of destroying the idol, Cromm Cruach, his *graiſ* fell out of his mantle into the heather, where he had some difficulty in finding it afterwards.‡

### 3. *Ancient Libraries.*

"**House of Manuscripts.**"—Considering the fame of the Irish universities for learning, and the need of books for students, it is plain that in all the important Irish monasteries there must have been good general libraries, including not only copies of native Irish books, but also works in Irish and Latin on the various branches of

\* Stokes, *Three Ir. Homilies*, 115: Petrie, *Round Towers*, 339.

† Adamn., 205, note *a*.

‡ Trip. Life, 92, *a*, 10.



learning then known, and copies of the Latin and Greek classics. The Annals of Tigernach, who was abbot of Clonmacnoise, and died in 1088, show that there was a well-furnished library in that great monastery: for—to use the words of Dr. Charles O'Connor:—"The quotations "from Latin and Greek authors in Tigernach are very "numerous: and his balancing their authorities against "each other shows a degree of criticism uncommon in "the age in which he lived." We often find mention of the *Tech-screptra* ('house of manuscripts'), which was the Irish name of the library. The Four Masters record at A.D. 1020 the burning of Armagh, "with all the fort, "without the saving of any house in it except the library "*(tech screptra)* only. . . . and [also were burned] their "books in the houses of the students." The school libraries are noticed in a passage in the Book of Leinster, which represents Dallan Forgaill (sixth century) as saying, "Among the schools with libraries (*etir scoluib screptra*) thou hast read the mysteries of the *Ro-suall* "\* (a monstrous sea-fish, for which see vol. II. page 515). Where the library was extensive there was a special *leabhar coimedach*, 'book-keeper' or 'librarian' (Adamn., 359, note *m*).

**Book-Satchels.**—The books in a library were usually kept, not on shelves, but in leather satchels, hung on pegs or racks round the walls: each satchel containing one or more manuscript volumes and labelled on the outside. When Longarad of Slieve Margy, a most eminent scholar of the sixth century, died, "the book-satchels of Ireland "*(tiaga lebar Erenn)* fell down [from their racks] on that "night. Or [according to another account] it is the "satchels wherein were books of every *dán* or science in "the cell where Columkille was that fell then: and "Columkille and everyone in that house marvelled, and "all are silent at the noisy shaking of the books."† The

\* LL, 168, *a*, 5; Silva Gad., 480, *ii*; 527, *xx*

† Feilire, 141

falling of the books typified the loss learning sustained by the death of Longarad.

Satchels were very generally employed to carry books about from place to place. It was necessary for a missionary priest to have always at hand books containing copies of the Gospels, offices, special prayers, &c., which he brought with him on his journeys: and students generally brought the few books necessary for their studies. Such books were almost always carried in a satchel, which is everywhere called *tiag*, or *tiag liubhair* ('a book satchel'). It was made of leather, and was commonly slung from the shoulder, by one or more straps. Adamann, who notices this way of carrying books, calls the bag *pelliceus sacculus*, a 'little leather satchel.'\*

Persons sometimes brought their books about in a large pocket in the outer mantle above the waist-girdle. In the Tripartite Life (p. 75), we read that St. Patrick, one time, met six young clerics and six gillies with them, with their books in their girdles" (*a llibair in a criss*). But he offered them the cushion-hide that he had sat and slept on for twenty years to make a *tiag* or satchel for their books: which they gladly accepted.

Manuscripts that were greatly valued were usually kept in elaborately wrought and beautifully ornamented leather covers: of which two are still preserved in Ireland, namely, the cover of the Book of Armagh, described and figured in Petrie's "Round Towers" (p. 332)—from which it has been copied here—and that of the shrine of St. Maidoc figured in the same book (p. 335), and fully described by Miss Stokes in "Archæologia."† According to Mr. Warren ("Corpus Missal," p. 20), this custom of keeping books in leather cases was peculiar to Ireland among western

\* For books carried in satchels see Stokes, Lives of SS., 230: Mac Congl., 10: Adamn., 115, 116: and Miss Stokes, Ancient Art, 50 to 52.

† The design of this has been reproduced on the covers of the published Annals of the Four Masters.

countries: but was common in the East. For instance, at the present day in the Abyssinian monastery of Souriani in Egypt, the books of the library are enclosed in sacks furnished with straps, and hung on pegs, exactly as described above for Ireland.\*



FIG. 125.

Leather Cover of the Book of Armagh. (From Petrie's Round Towers, p. 332)  
A little irregular on account of shrinkage.

Sometimes books were kept in a small case called *lebor-chomet* ('book-holder'), which appears to have been a box made partly or wholly of metals: for in the

\* Reeves, Adamn., 115, 116.



Tripartite Life it is stated that Bishop Assicus, who was Patrick's coppersmith (*faber-ereus*, a Latin term, is used here, though the narrative is in Irish), made quadrangular book-covers (*leborchometa chethrochori*) and other things in honour of Patrick.\*

**Destruction and Exportation of Books.**—Books abounded in Ireland when the Danes first made their appearance, about the beginning of the ninth century : so that the old Irish writers often speak with pride of "the hosts of the books of Erin." But with the first Danish arrivals began the woful destruction of manuscripts, the records of ancient learning. The animosity of the barbarians was specially directed against books, monasteries, and monuments of religion : and all the manuscripts they could lay hold on they either burned or "drowned"—*i.e.* flung them into the nearest lake or river.

For two centuries the destruction of manuscripts went on : and it ceased only when the Danes were finally crushed at Clontarf in 1014. During all this time the Irish missionaries and scholars who went abroad brought away great numbers of manuscripts merely to save them from destruction. In many of them are found to this day casual remarks, which, though trifling in themselves, bring vividly before us the solitary scribe as he sat working industriously in his cell twelve hundred years ago : and not unfrequently they name the home monasteries of the writers or indicate the dates. For example, in one of the eighth-century MSS. of Zeuss, now in St. Gall, these remarks are written on the margin :—*Do Inis Maiddoc dún, edon, meisse ocus Choirbbre* : "We belong to Inis Maiddoc, namely, myself and Carbery" : *Is gann membrum, is tána an dub* : "the vellum is scanty, the ink is thin."†

\* Trip. Life, 96, 97.

† Zeuss, Preface, XII. xiii. Inis Maiddoc, now St. Mogue's Island in Templeport Lake, near Ballyconnell in Cavan ; so called from St. Maidoc or Mogue of Ferns, who was born near that lake.



Three or four hundred years later (A.D. 1100), Mailmuri, the compiler and writer of the Book of the Dun Cow, wrote on the top margin (LU, p. 55) this remark, partly in Latin, as was usual with the old scribes:—*Probatio pennae Mailmuri mic mic Cuind na mBocht*: ‘A trial of the pen of Mailmuri, son of the son of Conn na mBocht’: and still later (fourteenth century), the scribe of the Lebar Brecc wrote this marginal remark (on p. 60):—*Promha pind o Fergal Mac Uilliam for in cuilmend oll*: ‘A testing of a pen by Fergal Mac William on the large volume.’

Scores of these venerable volumes are now found in Continental libraries: some no doubt written by Irishmen on the spot, but most brought from Ireland. Michael O’Clery, the chief of the Four Masters, writes, in 1631, in the Preface to his Book of Invasions:—“Alas, short was “the time until dispersion and decay overtook the churches “of the saints, their relics, and their books; for there is not “to be found of them [the books] now but a small remnant “that has not been carried away into foreign countries— “carried away so that their fate is unknown from that “time to this.”\* Books were also often sent as presentations from the monasteries at home to Continental monasteries founded by Irishmen†: but of such volumes it is pretty certain that there were always duplicates at home. The consequence of this long-continued exportation of Irish books is that there is now a vastly greater quantity of Irish of the ninth and earlier centuries on the Continent than we have in Ireland.

After the Battle of Clontarf there was a breathing time; and scholars like Mac Kelleher, Mac Gorman, and Mac Criffan‡ (pp. 493, 495. *infra*) set to work to rescue what

\* Hyde, Lit. Hist., 266, 267. † See Miss Stokes, Early Christian Art, 37.

‡ We may, I suppose, count these three men the first gleaners of scattered Gaelic lore whose work has come down to us. From their day to the present there has been a succession of zealous scholars who have made it their business to collect and write down the fugitive and decaying fragments of Celtic literature. An interesting sketch of those of Scotland will

was left of the old literature, collecting the scattered fragments and copying into new volumes everything that they could find worth preserving. Numbers of such books were compiled, and much of the learning and romance of old days was reproduced in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Notwithstanding the Danish devastations, many of the original volumes also—written long before the time of Mac Kelleher—still remained. But next came the Anglo-Norman invasion, which was quite as destructive of native learning and art as the Danish inroads, or more so; and most of the new transcripts, as well as of the old volumes that survived, were scattered and lost. The destruction of manuscripts continued during the perpetual wars that distracted the country, down to comparatively recent times: and many which existed even so late as 200 years ago are now gone. O'Curry, in the first Lecture of his "Manuscript Materials," gives a long list of the "Lost Books of Erin." The great gaps in Irish literature are painfully indicated everywhere in the fragments that remain. Prof. Kuno Meyer, in the Preface to his "King and Hermit," mentions, among "the great mass of material that has been irretrievably lost," "whole legendary cycles" revealed by casual references only, tales of which nothing "but the titles, poems of which the initial lines only, have" been preserved."

Books continued to be brought away to the Continent long after the time of Michael O'Clery; for those Catholic be found in Maclean's *Literature of the Celts* (chap. xviii.). Dr. Maclean winds up his chapter with a sketch and a well-deserved appreciation of the latest Scottish collector, Mr. Alexander Carmichael. May I add my tribute of admiration for Mr. Carmichael's work? By the publication of his *Carmina Gadelica*, he has placed, not only Scotland, but Ireland, under an everlasting debt of gratitude, for the book reflects Ireland as well as Scotland.

Our latest and most successful collector of Irish popular lore is Dr. Douglas Hyde, who has, during many years, taken down from the lips of the Irish-speaking Connaught peasantry a great collection of stories, songs, and rhymes, of which he has already published several volumes, very valuable to students of modern Irish language and folklore.

priests and others who fled from Ireland during the penal times commonly brought their precious manuscripts with them; and many other volumes were hidden away in remote places: for in those evil days, the mere fact of finding an Irish book in a man's possession put the owner in danger of his life.\* Even in our own day Irish manuscripts have been brought to America by emigrants who loved them too well to part with them.

#### 4. *Existing Books.*

**Volumes of Miscellaneous Matter.**—Of the eleventh and twelfth-century transcript volumes, portions, and only portions, of just two remain—Lebar-na-hUidhre [Lowr-na-Heera] or the Book of the Dun Cow, and Lebar Laigen [Lowr-Lyen] or the Book of Leinster. That these two books are copies from older manuscripts, and not themselves original compositions of the time, there is ample and unquestionable internal evidence. For example, on page 37 of the Book of the Dun Cow (copied A.D. 1100) is a remark in Irish, of which this is a translation:—"Pray for Moelmuiri Mac Ceileachair "who wrote and collected this book from a variety of "books." And as fully bearing this out, the same Moelmuiri, when transcribing the story of the Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel, says in one place towards the end of the Tale (Stokes's Da Derga p. 325):—"This "is what some books relate, viz., that but a few fell around "Conari, namely, nine only": and a little farther on he goes on to say:—"This however is the account given in "other books—which is probably truer—that of the people "of the hostel forty or fifty fell; and of the assailants "three-fourths of them."† But it must be borne in mind

\* See O'Curry, MS. Mat., 356.

† See for more illustrations, Rev. Celt., xi. 453 (where the copyist of the oldest version of the Wooing of Emer breaks off with this remark:—"And the remainder which is in the Book"): and Nutt's remarks in the Voyage of Bran, i. 125 and 126.

that we have many other books like the two above mentioned, copied after 1100 from very ancient volumes since lost." The Yellow Book of Lecan, for example, contains pieces as old as those in the Book of the Dun Cow—or older—though copied at a much later period.

Most of the books alluded to here and named below consist of miscellaneous matter:—tales, poems, biographies, genealogies, histories, annals, and so forth—all mixed up, with scarcely any attempt at orderly arrangement, and almost always copied from older books. This practice of copying miscellaneous pieces into one great volume was very common. Some of these books were large and important literary monuments, which were kept with affectionate care by their owners, and were celebrated among scholars as great depositories of Celtic learning, and commonly known by special names, such as the *Cuilmen*, the *Saltair of Cashel*, the *Book of Cuana*. No one was permitted to make entries in such precious books except practised and scholarly scribes; and the value set on them may be estimated from the fact that one of them was sometimes given as ransom for a captive chief.\* I will here notice a few of the most important of those we possess—all vellum; but there are also many important paper manuscripts.

The oldest of all these books of miscellaneous literature is the **Lebar-na-Heera**, or the **Book of the Dun Cow**† now in the Royal Irish Academy. By "the oldest" is meant that it was transcribed at an earlier time than any other remaining: but some books of later transcription contain pieces quite as old, or older. This book was written by Mailmuri Mac Kelleher, a learned scribe who died in Clonmacnoise in the year 1106. The entry in his own

\* For instances see next page, and Joyce, *Short Hist. of Irel.*, p. 341.

† Irish name *Lebar-na-hUidhre*; so called because the original manuscript of that name (which no longer exists) was written on vellum made from the skin of St. Ciaran's pet cow at Clonmacnoise. Irish, *odhar* [o-ar], 'a brown' [cow]; gen. *uidhre* or *h-uidhre*.



handwriting quoted on page 492 shows that the book was copied from older books. It is all through heavily glossed between the lines, proving the great antiquity of the pieces; as Mac Kelleher, even in 1100, found it necessary to explain in this manner numerous old words and phrases. About the year 1340 it was given by the O'Donnells of

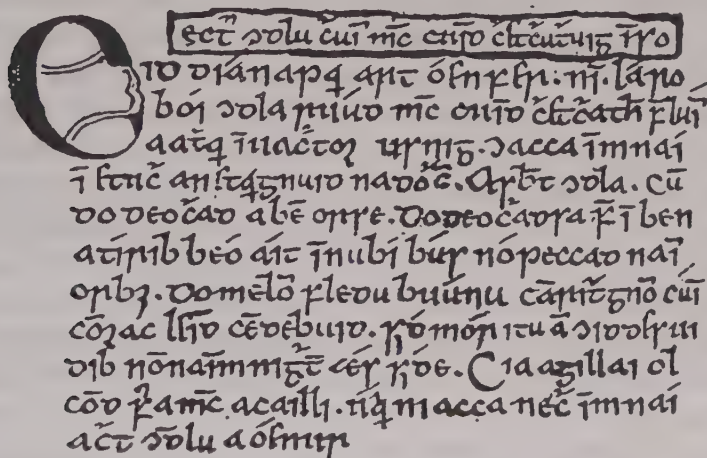


FIG. 126.

Facsimile of part of the Book of the Dun Cow, p. 120, col. 1. (Slightly smaller than the original.) The beginning of the story of Connla the Comely, or Connla of the Golden Hair. (This story will be found fully translated in Joyce's *Old Celtic Romances*.)

Translation of the above passage :—"The adventures of Connla the Comely, son of Conn the Hundred-Fighter, here. Whence the name of Art the Lone one? [Art the son of Conn, who was called 'Art the Lone One' after his brother Connla had been taken away by the fairy.] Not difficult to answer. On a certain day as Connla of the Golden Hair, son of Conn the Hundred-Fighter, stood beside his father on the Hill of Ushnagh, he saw a lady in strange attire coming towards him. Connla spoke: 'Whence hast thou come, O lady?' he says 'I have come,' replied the lady 'from the land of the ever-living, a place where there is neither death, nor sin, nor transgression. We have continual feasts; we practice every benevolent work without contention. We dwell in a large *Shee*; and hence we are called the people of the Fairy-Mound.' 'To whom art thou speaking, my boy?' says Conn to his son: for no one saw the lady save Connla only."

Tirconnell to O'Conor of Connaught as a ransom for their *ollave* of history who had been taken captive by the O'Conors some time before; but in 1470 the O'Donnells recovered it by force and brought it back to Tirconnell.

As it now stands it consists of only 134 folio pages—a mere fragment of the original work. It contains sixty-

five pieces of various kinds, several of which are imperfect on account of missing leaves. There are a number of romantic tales in prose; a copy of the celebrated *Amra* or elegy on St. Columkille composed by Dallan Forgaill about the year 592; an imperfect copy of the *Voyage of Maildune*; and an imperfect copy of the *Táin-bo-Quelna*, with several of the minor tales connected with it. Among the historical and romantic tales are the *Courtship of Emer*; the *Feast of Bricriu*; the *Abduction of Prince Connla the Comely* by the *shee* or fairies; part of the *Destruction of the palace of Da Derga* and the *Death of Conari king of Ireland*.\* The language of this book is nearer to the pure language of the *Zeussian glosses* than that of any other old book of general literature we possess.

The **Book of Leinster**, the next in order of age, now in Trinity College, Dublin, was written not later than the year 1160. There is good reason to believe that it was compiled wholly, or partly, by Finn Mac Gorman, who was bishop of Kildare from 1148 to 1160, and by Aed Mac Criffan, tutor of Dermot Mac Murrough king of Leinster, and that it belonged to this king or to some person of rank among his followers. The part of the original book remaining—for it is only a part—consists of 410 folio pages, and contains nearly 1000 pieces of various kinds, prose and poetry—historical sketches, romantic tales, topographical tracts, genealogies, &c.—a vast collection of ancient Irish lore. The following entry occurs at the foot of page 313:—"Aed [or Hugh] Mac Mic Criffan wrote this book and collected it from many books." Among its contents are a very fine perfect copy of the *Táin-bo-Quelna*, a *History of the origin of the Boru Tribute*, a description of Tara, a full copy of the *Dinnsenchus* or description of the celebrated places

\* Most of the pieces mentioned through this chapter will be described in the next three chapters.

of Erin. The Book of Leinster is an immense volume, containing about as much matter as six of Scott's prose novels.

The **Lebar Brecc**, or **Speckled Book** of Mac Egan, also called the **Great Book of Duniry**, is in the Royal Irish Academy. It is a large folio volume, now consisting of 280 pages, but originally containing many more, written in a small, uniform, beautiful hand. The text contains 226 pieces, with numbers of marginal and interlined entries, generally explanatory or illustrative of the text. The book was copied from various older books, most of them now lost. All, both text and notes, with a few exceptions, are on religious subjects: there is a good deal of Latin mixed with the Irish. Among the pieces are the *Feilire* of Aengus the Culdee, Lives of SS. Patrick, Brigit, and Columkille, and a Life of Alexander the Great. From the traditional titles of the book it is probable that it was written towards the end of the fourteenth century by one or more of the Mac Egans, a literary family who for many generations kept schools of Law, Poetry, and Literature at Duniry, near Portumna, in the county Galway, and also at Bally-mac-Egan, in the north of Tipperary.

The **Book of Ballymote**, in the Royal Irish Academy, is a large folio volume of 501 pages. It was written by several scribes about the year 1391, at Ballymote in Sligo, from older books, and contains a great number of pieces in prose and verse. Among them is a copy of the ancient Book of Invasions, *i.e.* a history of the Conquests of Ireland by the several ancient colonists. There are genealogies of almost all the principal Irish families; several historical and romantic tales of the early Irish kings; a history of the most remarkable women of Ireland down to the English invasion; an Irish translation of Nennius's History of the Britons; a copy of the Dinn-senchus; a translation of the Argonautic Expedition, and of the War of Troy.

The **Yellow Book of Lecan** [Leckan] in Trinity College is a large quarto volume of about 500 pages. It was written at Lecan in the county Sligo in or about the year 1390 by two of the scholarly family of Mac Firbis—Donogh and Gilla Isa. It contains a great number of pieces in prose and verse, historical, biographical, topographical, &c. ; among them the Battle of Moyrath, the Destruction of Bruden Da Derga, an imperfect copy of the Táin-bo Quelna, and the Voyage of Maildune.

The five books above described have been published in facsimile without translations by the Royal Irish Academy, page for page, line for line, letter for letter. The facsimile of the Book of the Dun Cow was edited by Sir John T. Gilbert, LL.D., F.S.A., the others by Dr. Robert Atkinson ; and all five have valuable Introductions and full descriptions of contents. Next to the publication of the *Grammatica Celtica*, the issue of these facsimiles was the greatest stimulus in modern times to the elucidation of ancient Gaelic lore : for scholars in all parts of the world can now study those five old books without coming to Dublin.

The **Book of Lecan** in the Royal Irish Academy, about 600 vellum pages, was written in 1416, chiefly by Gilla Isa Mór Mac Firbis. The contents resemble in a general way those of the Book of Ballymote.

There are many other books of miscellaneous Gaelic literature in the Royal Irish Academy and in Trinity College, such as the Book of Lismore, the Book of Fermoy, the Book of Hy Many ; besides numbers of books without special names. There are also numerous ms. volumes devoted to special subjects, such as Law, Medicine, Astronomy, and so forth, as will be found mentioned elsewhere in this book.

The vast mass of Irish literature sketched in this chapter is to be found in manuscripts, not in any one library, but scattered over almost all the libraries of



Europe. The two most important collections are those in Trinity College and in the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, where there are manuscripts of various ages, from the sixth or seventh down to the present century. In the Franciscan monastery of Adam and Eve in Dublin are a number of valuable manuscripts which were sent from the Franciscan monastery of St. Isidore's in Rome, a few years ago—a portion of the great collection made by the Franciscans at Louvain in the seventeenth century; and another fine collection is preserved in Maynooth College. There are also many important manuscripts in the British Museum in London; in the Bodleian Library at Oxford; and in the Advocate's Library\* in Edinburgh; besides the numerous MSS. in Continental libraries.

**Classification of Subject-Matter.**—Irish literature, so far as it has been preserved, may be classed as follows:—

- I. Ecclesiastical and Religious writings.
- II. Annals, History, and Genealogy.
- III. Tales—historical and romantic.
- IV. Law, Medicine, and Science.
- V. Translations or versions from other languages, Latin, Greek, French, &c.

**Translations.**—As to this last class: I will dismiss the subject of translations here with a few brief observations. Among the translations—remarks O'Curry—"We find an extensive range of subjects in ancient Mythology, Poetry, History, [Romance], and the Classical Literature of the Greeks and Romans, as well as many copious illustrations of the most remarkable events of the middle ages."† We have Irish versions of the Argonautic Expedition;

\* A good and interesting account of the collection of Gaelic manuscripts in the Advocate's Library—some native Scotch, some Irish—may be read in the seventh chapter of Dr. Magnus Maclean's lately published work, *The Literature of the Celts* (1902).

† MS. Mat., 24.

the Destruction of Troy ; portions of the Aeneid<sup>3</sup> ; the Destruction of Jerusalem ; the Wars of Charlemagne, including the History of Roland the Brave ; the History of the Lombards ; the almost contemporaneous translation of the Travels of Marco Polo ; the Adventures of Hercules ; Guy Earl of Warwick ; Bevis of Southampton ; the Quest of the Holy Grail ; the Theban War ; Mandeville's Travels ; and many other pieces. That such a mass of translation exists in Irish manuscripts shows—if there was need to show—the lively literary curiosity and the intense love of knowledge of every kind of the ancient Irish scholars. Apart from their literary aspect, these translations are of the highest value to students of the Irish language, as enabling them to determine the meaning of many obsolete Gaelic words and phrases.

Though many of the Irish tales are highly dramatic, the Irish never developed Drama in the proper sense of the word. There was no Irish theatre, and no open-air acting. But on this point it will be sufficient to refer the reader to Dr. Hyde's "Literary History of Ireland," p. 276 ; and to Sir Samuel Ferguson's "Poems" (1880), p. 62.

The ancient Irish writers commonly began their books or treatises with a statement of the "Place, Time, Person [or author], and cause." For example, Duaid Mac Firbis, in the beginning of his great manuscript work on Genealogies, writes:—"The place, time, author, and cause of writing this book are :—Its place is the College of St. Nicholas in Galway ; its time is the year of the age of Christ 1650 ; the author of it is Dubhaltach the son of Gilla Isa Mór Mac Firbisigh, historian, &c., of Lecain Mic Firbisigh in Tireragh of the Moy ; and the cause of writing the same book is to magnify the glory of God, and to give knowledge to all men in general."\*

For Irish Poetry and Prosody, see vol. II., p. 497.

\* O'Curry, MS. Mat., 216. For other examples, see Stokes, Féilire, p. 3 : and Hyde, Lit. Hist., 245.



FIG. 127 —Sculpture on a Capital : Priest's House, Glendalough : Beranger, 1779.  
(From Petrie's Round Towers.)

## CHAPTER XIII

### ECCLESIASTICAL AND RELIGIOUS WRITINGS



COPIES of the Gospels or of other portions of Scripture, that were either written or owned by eminent saints of the early Irish Church, were treasured with great veneration by succeeding generations ; and it became a common practice to enclose them, for better preservation, in ornamental boxes or shrines. Many shrines with their precious contents are still preserved : they are generally of exquisite workmanship in gold, silver, or other metals, precious stones, and enamel. Books of this kind are the oldest we possess.

The **Domnach Airgid**, or 'Silver Shrine,' which is in the National Museum, Dublin, is a box containing a Latin copy of the Gospels written on vellum. "This box," says Dr. Petrie, "is composed of three distinct covers, of which "the first or inner one is of wood—apparently yew ; the "second or middle one of copper plated with silver ; and "the third or outer one of silver plated with gold. In "the comparative ages of these several covers there is "obviously a great difference. The first may probably be "coeval with the manuscript which it was intended to "preserve ; the second, in the style of its scroll or inter- "laced ornaments, indicates a period between the sixth

“ and the twelfth centuries ; while the figures in relief, the “ ornaments, and the letters, in the third, leave no doubt “ of its being the work of the fourteenth century.”\* The Domnach Airgid was until lately preserved near Clones in Monaghan. It was once thought that the enclosed book was the identical copy of the Gospels presented by St. Patrick to his disciple St. Mac Carthenn, the founder of the see of Clogher ; but recent investigations go to show that it is not so old as the time of the great apostle.†

The **Book of Kells** is the most remarkable book of this class, though not the oldest. At the present day this is the best known of all the old Irish books, on account of its elaborate and beautiful ornamentation. A description of it will be found farther on, in the chapter on Irish Art (p. 546).

The **Cathach** [Caha] or **Battle-Book** of the O'Donnells. The following is the legend of the origin of this book. On one occasion St. Columkille was on a visit with St. Finnen of Movilla at a place called Drumfinn in Ulster, and while there, borrowed from him a copy of the Psalms. Wishing to have a copy of his own, and fearing refusal if he asked permission to make one, he secretly transcribed the book day by day in the church. St. Finnen found out what he was doing, but took no notice of the matter till the copy was finished, when he sent to Columkille for it, claiming that it belonged to him, as it was made from his book without permission. St. Columba refused to give it up, but offered to refer the dispute to the king of Ireland, Dermot the son of Fergus Kervall ; to which Finnen agreed. They both proceeded to Tara, obtained an audience, and laid the case before the king, who pronounced a judgment that long continued to be remembered as a proverb in

\* Trans. Roy. Ir. Acad., 1838.

† See the Rev. Dr. Bernard on the Domnach Airgid : Trans. Roy. Ir. Acad., xxx. 303, where he gives the result of his investigation to the above effect.



Ireland:—"To every cow belongeth her little offspring-cow: so to every book belongeth its little offspring-book: the book thou hast copied without permission, O Columba, I award to Finnen": a decision which may be said to contain the germ of the law of copyright.\* The book was afterwards however given up to St. Columkille; and it remained thenceforward—a precious heirloom—in possession of his kindred the O'Donnells. The beautifully wrought case of gilt silver, enamel, and precious stones,



FIG. 128.

Ruins of the Monastery of Movilla near Newtownards, of which St. Finnen or Finian (different from St. Finnen of Clonard) was abbot in the sixth century. The church shown here was erected long after his time on the site of the original church. (From Mrs. Hall's Ireland: drawn in 1845.)

subsequently made to cover this venerable relic, may be seen in the National Museum, Dublin, where it has been deposited by the head of the O'Donnell family. Only fifty-eight of the vellum leaves of the enclosed book remain; and the writing is a small uniform hand: but

\* This judgment, which is clear and terse in the original (*Le gach boin a boinin, le gach leabhar a leabhairin*), will appear equally clear in English—though losing much in force—in the following paraphrase:—"The calf, being the offspring of the cow, belongs to the cow: so the copy, being the offspring of the book, belongs to the book."

there is reason to doubt that this is the very manuscript written by St. Columkillè.\*

In Trinity College, Dublin, are two beautiful shrines enclosing two illuminated Gospel manuscripts, the **Book of Dimma**, and the **Book of St. Moling**, both written in the seventh or eighth century.

The **Book of Armagh**, now in Trinity College, for beauty of execution stands only second to the Book of Kells, and occasionally exceeds it in fineness and richness of ornamentation. The learned and accomplished scribe of this book was *Ferdomnach* of Armagh, who finished it in 807,† and died in 845. In several different places—at the end of certain portions—he wrote in Latin: “Pray for Ferdomnach”; and two of these entries are still perfectly legible. He no doubt wrote many other books—for writing was the business of his life—but they are all lost.

The book originally consisted of 442 pages, of which ten are lost: with this exception it is as perfect as when it was written. It is chiefly in Latin, with a good deal of old Irish interspersed. It opens with a Life of St. Patrick. Following this are a number of Notes of the Life and acts of the saint, compiled by Bishop Tirechan, who himself received them from his master Bishop Ultan, of the seventh century. These notes are not in the form of a connected narrative. The book contains a complete copy of the New Testament, and a Life of St. Martin of Tours. Perhaps the most interesting part of the whole manuscript is what is now commonly known as St. Patrick's Confession, in which the saint gives a brief

\* See Reeves in *Adamn.*, 319. For a fuller account of the whole transaction—the trial before King Dermot and its consequences—see Joyce, *Short Hist. of Ireland*, pp. 19, 20. For the use of the *Cathach* in battle by the O'Donnells, see p. 302, *supra*.

† The date has been determined by the late Dr. Graves, bishop of Limerick, after a very ingenious investigation: *Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad.*, III. 316–324, and 358. See also Dr. Reeves's Paper in *Proc.* for 1891–2, p. 77.

account, in simple unaffected Latin, of his captivity, his escape from slavery, his return to Ireland, the hardships and dangers he encountered, and the final success of his mission. At the end of the Confession, Ferdomnach writes this colophon in Latin :—" Thus far the volume which Patrick wrote with his own hand. The seventeenth day of March Patrick was translated to heaven." This entry was written about 300 years after the death of St. Patrick : and it appears from it that Ferdomnach had before him a book in the very handwriting of the great apostle, from which he copied the Confession. The old volume had become in many places illegible, or nearly so, from age : for in one part of his copy Ferdomnach makes this remark :—" Incertus liber hic " : ' the book is uncertain here ' : and in several other places he inserts a note of interrogation to show that he was in doubt about the reading. This " Confession " may be said to be the oldest piece of Irish literature we possess.

In 1004 an entry was made in a blank space of this book which almost transcends in interest the entries of Ferdomnach himself. In that year the great king Brian Boru made a triumphal circuit round Ireland, and arriving at Armagh, he made an offering of twenty ounces of gold on the altar of St. Patrick. He confirmed the ancient ecclesiastical supremacy of Armagh, and caused his secretary *Mailsuthain* to enter the decree in the Book of Armagh. The entry, which is as plain now as the day it was written, is in Latin, and stands in English :—" St. Patrick, when going to heaven, decreed that the " entire fruit of his labour, as well of baptism and causes " as of alms, should be rendered to the apostolic city, " which in the Scotie tongue is called Arddmach. Thus " I found it in the records of the Scots [*i.e.* the Irish]. " This I have written, namely, Mailsuthain, in the presence " of Brian, supreme ruler of the Scots, and what I have " written he decreed for all the kings of Cashel."

Of all the old books of Ireland this was for many ages the most celebrated and the most deeply venerated. The popular belief was that it was written by St. Patrick himself, from which it got the name of *Canoin Patrick*, Patrick's Testament. It was entrusted to the safe keeping of the members of a particular family, the Mac Moyres, who for generations enjoyed a liberal land-endowment in consideration of the importance of their trust. From this circumstance they got the name of Mac Moyre—*i.e.* the descendants of the *maer* or keeper.

This venerable book was about being published ; and the task of editing it was entrusted to the man who knew most about it, the Right Rev. Dr. Willian Reeves, late bishop of Down and Connor : but death intervened before he had time to finish the crowning literary work of his life. The book is in competent hands, however, and it will be published. Meantime every expression in Irish that occurs in the book has been edited and published, with great learning and skill, by the Rev. Dr. Edmund Hogan, S.J., in his "Documenta de S. Patricio."

Other Latin-Irish books of this class still preserved are the Book of Durrow, written by a scribe named Columba, not the great St. Columba, but a subsequent namesake : the Book of Mac Durnan : the Stowe Missal, now in the Royal Irish Academy : and the Garland of Howth, now in Trinity College, Dublin : all belonging to the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, and all elaborately ornamented ; some little inferior indeed to the Book of Kells.

We have a vast body of original ecclesiastical and religious writings. Among them are the **Lives of a great many of the most distinguished Irish saints**, mostly in Irish, some few in Latin, some on vellum, some on paper, of various ages, from the seventh century down to the eighteenth. Of these manuscripts the great majority are in Dublin ; but there are many also in the British Museum,



as well as in Brussels and elsewhere on the Continent. The Lives of the three patrons of Ireland—Patrick, Brigit, and Columkille—are, as might be expected, more numerous than those of the others. Of these the best-known is the “Tripartite Life of St. Patrick,” so called because it is divided into three parts. There is a manuscript copy of this in the British Museum, and another in the library of the University of Oxford. It is in Irish, mixed here and there with words and sentences in Latin. Colgan and others after him have given their opinion that it was originally written in the sixth century by St. Evinn of Monasterevin: but it certainly is not so early. Dr. Petrie (Tara, 55), and Dr. Todd (St. Patk. 124, note 3), both assign it to the “ninth or tenth century”; while Dr. Stokes (Trip. Life, lxii) gives the tenth century as the superior limit. The compiler, whoever he was, had older books lying before him.\* This has been lately printed in two volumes, with translations and elaborate and valuable introduction and notes by Dr. Stokes.

Besides the Irish Lives of St. Columkille, there is one in Latin, written by Adamnan, who died in the year 703. He was a native of Donegal, and ninth abbot of Iona; and his memoir has been pronounced by the learned Scotch writer Pinkerton—who is not given to praise Irish things—to be “one of the most curious monuments of the literature of that age. It is certainly the most complete piece of such biography that all Europe can boast of, not only at so early a period, but even through the whole middle ages.”† It has been published for the Archæological and Celtic Society by the Rev. Dr. William Reeves, who, in his Introduction and Notes, supplies historical, local, and biographical information drawn from every conceivable source.‡

\* Trip. Life, 127, last paragraph, and 139, 4.

† Pinkerton, Inquiry, Ed. 1814, xlviïi. See also p. 6, *supra*.

‡ A full account of this work, with the various manuscripts in which

In the year 1645 the Rev. John Colgan, a Franciscan friar, a native of Donegal, published at Louvain, where he then resided in the Irish monastery of that city, a large volume entitled “*Acta Sanctorum Hiberniæ*,” the ‘*Lives of the Saints of Ireland*,’ all in Latin, translated by himself from ancient Irish manuscripts. They are arranged according to the festival days of the saints; and the volume contains the Lives of those whose days fall in the three first months of the year. His intention was no doubt to finish the work to the 31st December; but he stopped at the 31st March, and never published any more of that work. In 1647 he published another volume, also in Latin, which he calls “*Acta Triadis Thaumaturgæ*,” the ‘*Lives of the Wonder-working Triad*.’ It is devoted to Saints Patrick, Brigit, and Columkille, and consists almost entirely of translations of all the old Irish Lives of these three saints that he could find: there are seven Lives of St. Patrick, including the Tripartite. Both volumes are elaborately annotated by the learned editor; and text and notes—all in Latin—contain a vast amount of biographical, historical, topographical, and legendary information. (For the Lives of the Saints, see also p. 6, *supra*.)

Another class of Irish ecclesiastical writings are the Calendars, or **Martyrologies**, or **Festilogies**—Irish, **Féilire** [fail’ira], a festival list. The *Féilire* is a catalogue of saints, arranged according to their festival days, with usually a few facts about each, briefly stated, but with no detailed memoirs. There are several of these Martyrologies. I mention one in the next chapter, the Calendar of Michael O’Clery; and the only other one I will notice is the **Féilire of Aengus the Culdee**, which is in verse. The circumstance that gave rise to this metrical catalogue is related in an ancient legend. One time while Aengus (who died about the year 820) was at the church of Coolbanagher, in the

it is preserved, is given in Dr. Reeves’s Preface, of which an abstract will be found in Mr. Maclean’s *Literature of the Celts*, chap. iv.

present Queen's County, he saw a host of angels alighting one after another on a grave and immediately reascending. He asked the priest of the church who it was that was buried there, and what he had done to merit such honour. The priest replied that it was a poor old man who lived in the place, and who did not seem to be distinguished for any unusual piety : but that he had made it a practice to invoke a number of the saints of the world—as many as he could remember—going to bed at night and getting up



FIG. 12

Church and (imperfect) Round Tower of Dysert-Aengus, one mile west of Croom in Limerick, where St. Aengus the Culdee founded a church about A.D. 800. (From Mrs. Hall's Ireland.)

in the morning. "Ah, my God!" exclaimed Aengus "when this poor old man is so honoured for what he did, how great should be the reward of him who should make a poetical composition in praise of all the saints of the year." Whereupon he began his poem. He continued to work at it during his subsequent residence at Clonenagh in Queen's County, and finished it while living in St. Mailruan's Monastery at Tallaght near Dublin.

The body of the poem consists of 365 quatrains stanzas, one for each day in the year, each stanza commemorating one or more saints—chiefly but not exclusively Irish—whose festivals occur on the particular day. But there are also poetical prologues and epilogues and prose prefaces, besides a great collection of glosses and explanatory commentaries, all in Irish, interspersed with the text; and all written by various persons who lived after the time of Aengus. There are several manuscript copies, one being in the *Lebar Brecc*. The whole *Féilire*, with Prefaces, Glosses, and Commentaries, has been translated and edited, with learned notes, by Dr. Whitley Stokes for the Royal Irish Academy.\*

To Aengus is also commonly attributed—but it seems erroneously—**Saltair na Rann**, *i.e.* the ‘Psalter of the Quatrains,’ of which the only complete copy lies in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. It consists of 162 short Irish poems on sacred subjects. The whole collection has been published by Dr. Whitley Stokes, with glossary of words, but without translation. How ancient and difficult is the language of these pieces may be judged from the fact that Dr. Stokes was obliged to leave a large number of words in the glossary unexplained.

There is a class of ecclesiastical writings devoted exclusively to the **pedigrees or genealogies of the Irish saints**, all of which, besides the direct knowledge they convey, contain a large amount of Irish topographical and antiquarian information. Of these there are several, the oldest being that ascribed to Aengus the Culdee. Copies of this tract are found in the Books of Leinster and Ballymote, and in Mac Firbis’s Book of Genealogies. Not one of these genealogies has been published.

\* From an examination of the grammatical forms, the well-known Celtic grammarian, Dr. J. Strachan, and an equally well-known Continental scholar, R. Thurneysen, both believe the *Féilire* was composed about A.D. 800. *Rev. Celt.*, xx. 191. This, for so far, goes to confirm the universal tradition ascribing it to Aengus, who was living in that year.



The **Book of Hymns** is one of the manuscripts in Trinity College, Dublin, copied at some time not later than the ninth or tenth century. It consists of a number of hymns—some in Latin, some in Irish—composed by the primitive saints of Ireland—St. Sechnall, St. Ultan, St. Cummain Fada, St. Columba, and others—with Prefaces, Glosses, and Commentaries, mostly in Irish, by ancient copyists and editors. It has been published by the Irish Archæological and Celtic Society, edited, with annotations and with translations of the Irish hymns and Irish Commentaries, by the Rev. Dr. James Henthorn Todd. Another edition—"The Irish Liber Hymnorum or Book of Hymns"—with some additional hymns, has been lately edited by the Rev. Dr. Bernard, F.T.C.D., and Robert Atkinson, LL.D.

There are manuscripts on various other ecclesiastical subjects scattered through libraries—canons and rules of monastic life, prayers and litanies, hymns, sermons, explanations of the Christian mysteries, commentaries on the Scriptures, &c.—many very ancient. Of the numerous modern writings of this class, I will specify only two, written in classical modern Irish about the year 1630 by the Rev. Geoffrey Keating: the "Key-shield of the Mass" and the "Three Shafts of Death." This last has been published for the Royal Irish Academy without translation, but with an excellent Glossary, by Dr. Robert Atkinson.

There was an Irish treatise on the Psalter, of which the fragment that remains has been translated by Professor Kuno Meyer in "*Hibernia Minora*," and which, according to him, was originally written about A.D. 750, showing a careful study of the subject, and an intimate acquaintance with the ancient ecclesiastical writers of the world.

Another ecclesiastical relic belonging to Ireland should be mentioned—the Antiphonary, or Hymn Book, of St. Comgall's Monastery of Bangor in the County Down; written in this monastery about A.D. 680. In order to

save it from certain destruction by the Danes it was brought to the Continent by—as is generally believed—Dungal, a famous Irish monk, who settled in Pavia in 811 (For Dungal, see also p. 468, *supra*). After lying hidden and neglected for a thousand years among heaps of old mss., it was found at last in Bobbio by Muratori, who pub-

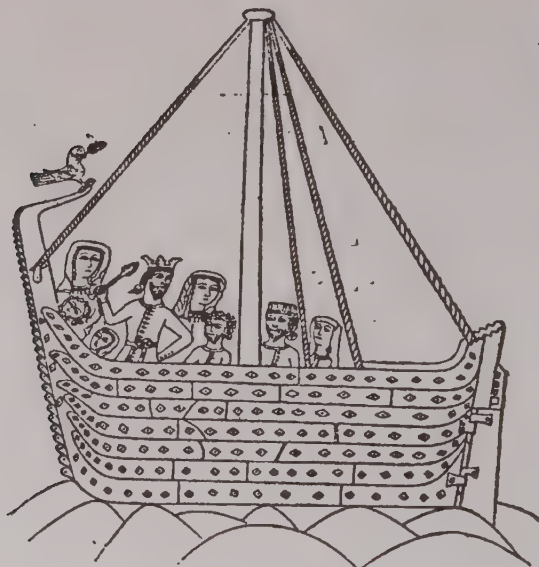


FIG. 130.

Noah's Ark: reduced from the larger sketch on a fly-leaf of the Book of Ballymote. (Copied direct from the Kilk. Arch. Journal for 1870-1, p. 141.)

lished it early in the eighteenth century. It has been edited several times since; for which see Stokes and Strachan's *Thes.*, II., xxxi., xxxii. This venerable ms. is now in the Ambrosian Library in Milan.

Writers of sacred history sometimes illustrated their narratives with rude pen-and-ink sketches of Biblical subjects, of which an example is given above—a quaint figure of Noah's Ark drawn on a blank fly-leaf of the Book of Ballymote in the fourteenth century.



FIG. 131.—Sculpture on a Capital : Priest's House, Glendalough : Beranger, 1779.  
(From Petrie's Round Towers.)

## CHAPTER XIV

### ANNALS, HISTORIES, AND GENEALOGIES

#### SECTION I. *How the Annals were compiled.*



AMONG the various classes of persons who devoted themselves to Literature in ancient Ireland, there were special **Annalists**, who made it their business to record, with the utmost accuracy, all remarkable events simply and briefly, without any ornament of language, without exaggeration, and without fictitious embellishment. The extreme care they took that their statements should be truthful is shown by the manner in which they compiled their books. As a general rule they admitted nothing into their records except either what occurred during their lifetime, and which may be said to have come under their own personal knowledge, or what they found recorded in the compilations of previous annalists, who had themselves followed the same plan. These men took nothing on hearsay : and in this manner successive Annalists carried on a continued chronicle from age to age, thus giving the whole series the force of contemporary testimony.\* We have still preserved to us many books of native Annals, the most important of which will be briefly described in this chapter.

\* Of course it is not claimed for the Irish Annals that they are absolutely free from error. In the early parts there is much legendary matter ; and some errors have crept in among the records belonging to the historical period.

Most of the ancient manuscripts whose entries are copied into the books of Annals we now possess have been lost ; but that the entries were so copied is rendered quite certain by various expressions found in the present existing Annals, as well as by the known history of several of the compilations. The compiler of the Annals of Ulster, for instance, Cathal Maguire, an eminent divine, philosopher, and historian, who died of smallpox, A.D. 1498, often refers to the authorities that lay before him in such terms as these “—“ So I have found it in the Book of Cuana ” ; “ I state this according to the Book of Mochod ” ; “ This is given as it is related in the Book of Dubhdaleith,” and such like ; and we know that the Four Masters compiled their Annals from the collection of old mss. they had brought together in Donegal. But nearly all the authorities referred to, or used, in both books of Annals have disappeared.

As an example of what manner of men the Annalists were I will instance one of the earliest of those whose books are still extant :—Tigernach O'Breen, who died in 1088. He was abbot of the monasteries of Clonmacnoise and Roscommon, and was one of the greatest scholars of his age. He was acquainted with the chief historical writers of the world known in his day ; and it is clear that he had—as already remarked—the use of an excellent library in Clonmacnoise. He quotes the Venerable Bede, Josephus, St. Jerome, Orosius, and many other ancient authorities, and with great judgment compares and balances their authorities one against another. Of course he made use of the works of all previous Irish historians and annalists. See also p. 486, *supra*.

## 2. *Tests of Accuracy.*

**Physical Phenomena.**—There are many tests of the accuracy of our records, of which I will here notice three classes :—Physical phenomena, such as eclipses and



comets : the testimony of foreign writers ; and the consistency of the records among themselves. Whenever it happens that we are enabled to apply tests belonging to any one of these three classes—and it happens very frequently—the result is almost invariably a vindication of the accuracy of the records.\* A few instances will be given : but the subject is too extensive, and the proofs too numerous to be fully dealt with here. The examples are not selected with a view to a foregone conclusion : that is to say, the favourable cases are not brought forward, and those that tell unfavourably held back : they are taken as they come ; and those given may be considered types of all.

Let us first instance the records of physical phenomena : and of these I will set out with one very instructive and impressive example—the solar eclipse of A.D. 664, a year rendered memorable by the ravages of the terrible yellow plague, which swept over all Europe. The Venerable Bede, writing fifty or sixty years after this eclipse, records it as he found it mentioned—vaguely mentioned as to time—in some record, or perhaps from the reports of some old persons who had seen it. At any rate, not knowing the exact day and hour, he calculated backwards, using the only means then known for such calculations—the Dionysian Cycle—which was a little incorrect. This led him to the 3rd May, 664, as the date of the eclipse—two days wrong. The *Annals of Ulster*, in its brief and simple record, give the correct date, 1st May, and even the very hour : a striking proof that the event had been originally recorded by some Irish chronicler who actually saw it, from whose record—or perhaps from a copy—or a copy of a copy—the writer of the *Annals of Ulster* transcribed it.

The Irish annals record about twenty-five eclipses and

\* Another class, the evidence of ancient monuments, is noticed in various parts of this book, especially chap. i.

comets at the several years from A.D. 496 to 1066, which are collected from various books by Cathal Maguire in the Annals of Ulster, and which will be found set forth in one list by O'Donovan in his Introductory Remarks to the Annals of the Four Masters. The dates of all these as entered in the Annals of Ulster, are found, according to modern scientific calculation and the records of other countries, to be correct. This shows conclusively that the original records were made by eye-witnesses, and not by calculation in subsequent times : for any such calculation—resting on incorrect methods—would be sure to give an incorrect result, as in the case of Bede.

A well-known entry in the Irish account of the Battle of Clontarf, fought A.D. 1014, comes under the tests of natural phenomena. The author of *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, the ' War of the Gaels with the Galls,' writing early in the eleventh century, soon after the battle, states, in his detailed account, that it was fought on Good Friday, the 23rd April ; that the battle commenced in the morning at sunrise *when the tide was full in* ; and that it continued the whole day till the tide was again at flood in the evening, when the foreigners were routed :—" They " [*i.e.* the two armies] continued in battle array, fighting " from sunrise till evening. This is the same length of " time as that which the tide takes to go and to fall and to " flood again. For it was at the full tide the foreigners " came out to fight the battle in the morning, and the tide " had come to the same place again at the close of the " day, when the foreigners were defeated." So the Irish record.

The time of high water, it is to be observed, is noticed *incidentally* here in order to account for the great slaughter of the Danes in the evening during the rout ; for as the tide was at height at the time, they were not able to reach their ships or boats, which were anchored in the bay, and which they might wade to at low water. Their only

other means of escape—the single bridge that led to their fortress in Dublin at the other side of the Liffey—was cut off, partly by the tide and partly by a detachment of Irish : so that the chronicler goes on to say :—“ An awful rout was “ made of the foreigners, so that they fled simultaneously, “ and they shouted their cries for mercy ; but they could “ only fly to the sea, as they had no other place to retreat “ to, seeing they were cut off from the head of Dubgall’s “ Bridge,”\*

As soon as Dr. Todd, the translator and editor of the “ War of the Gaels with the Galls,” came across this passage, in the year 1867, it struck him at once that here was an obvious means of testing—so far—the truth of the old narrative ; and he asked the Rev. Dr. Haughton, a well-known eminent scientific man, a Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, to calculate for him the time of high water in Dublin Bay on the 23rd April, 1014. After a laborious calculation, Dr. Haughton found that the tide was at its height that morning at half-past five o’clock, just as the sun was coming over the horizon, and that the evening tide was at fifty-five minutes past five : a striking confirmation of the truth of this part of the narrative. It shows, too, that the account was written by, or taken down from, an eye-witness of the battle.†

**Testimony of Foreign Writers.**—Events occurring in Ireland in the middle ages are not often mentioned by British or Continental writers : they knew little of the country, which was in those times—as regarded the Continent—a very remote place. But in the few cases where they do notice Irish affairs, they are always—or nearly always—in agreement with the native records. A few of these corroborations, moreover, may serve as a warning to us not to be too ready to reject ancient narratives as

\* Dr. Todd’s translation in his edition of the War of the Gaels with the Galls, p. 191.

† Dr. Haughton’s calculation will be found in War of GG, Introd. xxvi.

unworthy of notice because they happen to have about them an air of romance or fiction. The great body of the early history of all countries is compiled from narratives much mixed up with romance and fiction, from which modern historical writers have to select the truth as best they can.

Irish bardic history relates in much detail how the Picts, coming from Thrace, landed on the coast of Leinster in the reign of Eremon, the first Milesian king of Ireland, many centuries before the Christian era : that they aided the king of Leinster to defeat certain British tribes who had given great trouble ; that when, after some time, they proposed to settle in the province, Eremon refused to permit them, advising them to cross the sea once more, and make conquests for themselves in a country lying to the north-east, *i.e.* in Alban or Scotland, and promising them aid in case they needed it. To this they agreed ; and they requested Eremon to give them some marriageable women for wives, which he did, but only on this condition, that the right of succession to the kingship should be vested in the female progeny rather than in the male. And so the Picts settled in Scotland with their wives.\* Now all this is confirmed by the Venerable Bede, but with some differences in detail. His account is that the Picts, coming from Scythia, were driven by wind on the *northern* coast of Ireland. The Irish refused them land on which to settle, but advised them to sail to a country lying eastward, which could be seen from Ireland, and offered them help to conquer it. The Picts obtained wives from the Scots (*i.e.* the Irish), on condition that when any difficulty arose they should choose a king from the female royal line rather than from the male ; “ which custom,” continues Bede, “ has been observed among them to this day.”†

\* See Irish version of Nennius (Ir. Arch. Soc.), pp. 121 *et seq.* : and O'Mahony's Keating, pp. 213 *et seq.*, and p. 382. † Bede, Eccl. Hist., i. i.



Coming down to more historic times. We have already seen (p. 82, *supra*) that the Irish accounts of the colony led by Carbery Riada to Scotland in the third century of the Christian era have been confirmed by the Venerable Bede.

All the Irish annals, as well as the "War of the Gaels with the Galls" (pp. 5, 222), record a great defeat of the Danes near Killarney in the year 812, which so deterred them that many years elapsed before they attempted to renew their attacks. This account is fully borne out by an authority totally unconnected with Ireland, the well-known book of Annals, written by Eginhard (the tutor of Charlemagne), who was living at this very time. Under A.D. 812 he writes:—"The fleet of the Northmen, having invaded Hibernia, the island of the Scots, after a battle had been fought with the Scots, and after no small number of the Norsemen had been slain, they basely took to flight and returned home."\*

Sometimes confirmation comes from the most unexpected quarters. In one of the historical Tales of the *Táin*, or Cattle-spoil of Quelna, which took place in the first century of the Christian era, we are told that King Concobar Mac Nessa conferred knighthood on the great hero Cuculainn at seven years of age, who, during the ceremony, broke many weapons by sheer strength. We find this event also mentioned in the Annals of Tigernach, in the simple record that Cuculainn "took valour" at seven years of age. This appears to have established a precedent, so that the fashion became pretty common of knighting the sons of kings and great chiefs at the age of seven years (see p. 98, *supra*).

Now all this looks shadowy, romantic, and mythical; yet we find it recorded in the pages of Froissart that the

\* Lynch, Cambr. Ev., I. 165, 167; III. 273: Joyce, Short Hist. of Irel., 190: Miss Stokes, Early Ir. Architecture, 149.

custom of knighting kings' sons at seven years of age existed in Ireland in the end of the fourteenth century, having held its place, like many ancient Irish customs, for at least fourteen hundred years. When Richard II. visited Ireland in 1494, he entertained the Irish kings and chiefs in a magnificent manner, and proposed to confer knighthood on the four provincial kings, O'Neill, O'Connor, Mac Murrough, and O'Brien. But they told him they did not need it, as they had been knighted already; for they said it was the custom for every Irish king to knight his son at seven years of age. The account of all these proceedings were given to Froissart by a French gentleman named Castide, who had lived seven years among the Irish. The narrative goes on to describe the Irish manner of conferring knighthood at the time:—that a shield was set up on a stake in a level field; that a number of little spears were given to the youthful aspirant; that he thereupon hurled them against the shield; and that the more spears he broke the more honour he received: all corresponding with the ancient Irish romantic narrative. (Johnes's "Froissart," II. 577.)

To return to the Battle of Clontarf: we must not omit a corroboration of the truthfulness of the Irish account coming from an unimpeachable source. All the Irish chroniclers state that a general rout of the Danes took place in the evening: which is fully corroborated in the Norse records. There is a brief description of "Brian's Battle," as the Danes called it, in the Danish saga, "Burnt Nial," in which this final rout is recorded by the Norse writer—the best possible authority on the point under the circumstances—in language much more simple and terse than that of the Irish chronicler: it is merely this short sentence:—"Then flight broke out throughout all the [Danish] host."\*

\* See for a full account of the Battle of Clontarf, Joyce, *Short Hist. of Ireland*, p. 210.

**Consistency of the Records among themselves.**—Testimonies under this heading might be almost indefinitely multiplied, but I will here instance only a few. The names of fifteen abbots of Bangor, who died before 691, are given in the Irish Annals, not all together, but at the respective years of their death. In the ancient Service Book, known as the “Antiphonary of Bangor” (for which see p. 510, *supra*), there is a hymn in which, as Dr. Reeves says,\* “these fifteen abbots are recited [in one list] in the same order as in the Annals; and this undesigned coincidence is the more interesting because the testimonies are perfectly independent, the one being afforded by Irish records which never left the kingdom, and the other by a Latin composition which has been a thousand years absent from the country where it was written.”

References by Irishmen to Irish affairs are found in numerous volumes scattered over all Europe:—Annalistic entries, direct statements in tales and biographies, marginal notes, incidental references to persons, places, and customs, and so forth, written by various men at various times; which, when compared one with another, and with the home records, hardly ever exhibit a disagreement. The best illustration of this is Adamnan’s “Life of Columba.” Adamnan’s main object was to set forth the spiritual life of St. Columba, who lived about a century before him, to describe, as he tells us, the Miracles, the Prophecies, and the Angelic Visions of the saint. But in carrying out this ideal, he has everywhere in his narrative to refer to persons living in Ireland and Scotland, mostly contemporaries of Columba, as well as to the events and customs of the time—references which are mostly incidental, brought in merely to fix the surroundings of the saint and his proceedings. Beyond this Adamnan was not at all concerned with Irish history, genealogy, or social life. But when we come to test and compare these incidental references with

\* Eccl. Antiqq., 153.

the direct and deliberate statements in Irish annals, biographies, tales, and genealogies, which is, perhaps, the severest of all tests in the circumstances, we find an amazing consensus of agreement, and never, so far as I can call to mind, a contradiction.

The more the ancient historical records of Ireland are examined and tested, the more their truthfulness is made manifest. Their uniform agreement among themselves, and their accuracy, as tried by the ordeals of astronomical calculation and of foreign writers' testimony, have drawn forth the acknowledgments of the greatest Irish scholars and archæologists that ever lived, from Ussher and Ware to those of our own day, and especially of Dr. Reeves, the learned editor of Adamnan's "Life of Columba." These men knew what they were writing about; and it is instructive, and indeed something of a warning to us, to mark the sober and respectful tone in which they speak of Irish records, occasionally varied by an outburst of admiration as some unexpected proof turns up of the faithfulness of the old Irish writers and the triumphant manner in which they come through all ordeals of criticism.

### 3. *Principal Books of Annals.*

The following are the principal books of Irish Annals remaining.\* The **Synchronisms of Flann**. This Flann was a layman, *Ferleginn* or Principal of the school of Monasterboice: died in 1056 (see p. 417, *supra*). He compares the chronology of Ireland with that of other countries, and gives the names of the monarchs that reigned in Assyria, Persia, Greece, and Rome, from the most remote period, together with most careful lists of the Irish kings who reigned contemporaneously with them. Copies of this tract, but imperfect, are preserved in the Books of Lecan and Ballymote.

\* For further information, see O'Curry, MS. Mat., and Dr. Hyde's Literary History, under the proper headings.



The **Annals of Tigernach** [Teerna]. Tigernach O'Breen, the compiler of these Annals, has been already mentioned (p. 513). Like most of the other books of annals, his work is written in Irish, mixed with a good deal of Latin. In the beginning he treats of the general history of the world, with some brief notices of Ireland—the usual practice of Irish annalists; but the history of Ireland is the chief subject of the body of the work. One most important pronouncement he makes, which has been the subject of much discussion, that all the Irish accounts before the time of *Cimbaeth* [Kimbay], B.C. 370, are uncertain. Several copies of his Annals are in existence in London, Oxford, and Dublin, but all imperfect. The fragments that remain have been edited and the Irish portions translated by Dr. Whitley Stokes in the *Revue Celtique*, vols. xvi. and xvii.

The **Annals of Innisfallen** were compiled by some scholars of the monastery of Innisfallen, the ruins of which still stand on the well-known island of that name in the Lower Lake of Killarney. They are written in Irish mixed with Latin. In the beginning they give a short history of the world to the time of St. Patrick, after which they treat chiefly of Ireland. Their composition is generally ascribed to the year 1215; but there is good reason to believe that they were commenced two centuries earlier. They were subsequently continued to 1318.

The **Annals of Ulster**, also called the **Annals of Senait Mac Manus**, were written in the little island of Senait Mac Manus, now called Belle Isle, in Upper Lough Erne. They treat almost exclusively of Ireland from A.D. 444. The original compiler was Cathal [Cahal] Maguire, already mentioned (p. 513), who died in 1498; and they were continued to the year 1541 by Rory O'Cassidy, and by a nameless third writer to 1604. There are several copies of these annals, one in a beautiful hand in a vellum manuscript of Trinity College, Dublin. One volume has

been issued, translated and annotated by the late William M. Hennessy; the rest by the Rev. B. McCarthy, D.D.

The **Annals of Loch Ce** [Key] were copied in 1588 for Brian Mac Dermot, who had his residence on an island in Lough Key, near Boyle in Roscommon. They are in the Irish language, and treat chiefly of Ireland from 1014 to 1636, but have many entries of English, Scottish, and Continental events. The only copy of these annals known to exist is a small-sized vellum manuscript in Trinity College, Dublin. They have been translated and edited in two volumes by Mr. William M. Hennessy.

The **Annals of Connaught** from 1224 to 1562. There is a copy in Trinity College, Dublin, and another in the Royal Irish Academy.

The **Chronicon Scotorum** (Chronicle of the Scots or Irish) down to A.D. 1135. This was compiled about 1650 by the great Irish antiquary Duaid Mac Firbis. His autograph copy is in Trinity College, and two other copies are in the Royal Irish Academy. These annals have been printed, edited with translation and notes by William M. Hennessy.

The **Annals of Boyle**, from the earliest time to 1253, are contained in a vellum manuscript in the library of the British Museum. They are written in Irish mixed with Latin; and the entries throughout are very meagre.

The **Annals of Clonmacnoise**, from the earliest period to 1408. The original Irish of these is lost; but we have an English translation by Connell Mac Geoghegan of Lismoynty in Westmeath, which he completed in 1627. Of this translation several copies are preserved, of which one is in Trinity College and another in the British Museum. O'Donovan printed many extracts from this compilation in his Notes to the Annals of the Four Masters: and the whole collection has been lately edited by the Rev. Denis Murphy, S.J.

The **Annals of the Four Masters**, also called the **Annals of Donegal**, are the most important of all. They were compiled in the Franciscan monastery of Donegal, by three of the O'Clerys, Michael, Conary, and Cucogry, and by Ferfesa O'Mulconry ; who are now commonly known as the Four Masters. The O'Clerys were, for many generations, hereditary *ollaves* or professors of history to



FIG. 132

Kilbarron Castle. (From the Irish Penny Journal, p. 225 : drawn by Petrie.)

the O'Donnells, princes of Tirconnell, and held free lands, and lived in the castle of Kilbarron, on the sea-coast north-west of Ballyshannon. Here Michael O'Clery, who had the chief hand in compiling the Annals, was born in 1575. He was a lay brother of the order of St. Francis, and devoted himself during his whole life to the history of Ireland. Besides his share in the Annals of the Four

Masters, he wrote a book containing (1) a Catalogue of the kings of Ireland; (2) the Genealogies of the Irish saints; and (3) an Account of the saints of Ireland, with their festival days, now known as the Martyrology of Donegal. This last has been printed by the Irish Archaeological and Celtic Society, with translation by John O'Donovan, edited by the Rev. James Henthorn Todd, D.D., and the Rev. William Reeves, D.D. Brother Michael also wrote the Book of Invasions, of which there is a beautiful copy in the Royal Irish Academy. It is a sort of chronological history, giving an account of the conquests of Ireland by the several colonists, down to the English Invasion, with many valuable quotations from ancient Irish poems. There is an older Book of Invasions of which the Book of Ballymote contains a copy.

Conary O'Clery, a layman, acted as scribe and general assistant to his brother Michael. His descendants were for long afterwards scholars and historians, and preserved his manuscripts. Cucogry or Peregrine O'Clery was a cousin of the two former, and was chief of the Tirconnell sept of the O'Clerys. He was a layman, and devoted himself to history and literature. He wrote in Irish a Life of Red Hugh O'Donnell, of which his autograph copy is in the Royal Irish Academy. This has been translated, annotated, and published—text and translation—by the Rev. Denis Murphy, S.J. The fourth Master, Ferfesa O'Mulconry, was a historian from Kilronan in Roscommon.

The materials for this great work were collected after many years' labour by Brother Michael O'Clery, who brought every important historical Irish manuscript he could find in Ireland to the monastery of Donegal; for he expressed his fears that if the work were not then done the materials might never be brought together again. His fears seemed prophetic; for the great rebellion of 1641 soon followed; all the manuscripts he had used



were scattered, and only one or two of them now survive. Even the Four Masters' great compilation was lost for many generations, and was recovered in a manner almost miraculous, and placed in the Royal Irish Academy by Dr. George Petrie. The work was undertaken under the encouragement and patronage of Fergall O'Gara, prince of Coolavin, who paid all the necessary expenses; and the community of Donegal supplied the historians with food and lodging. They began their labours in 1632, and completed the work in 1636.\* The Annals of the Four Masters was translated with most elaborate and learned annotations by Dr. John O'Donovan; and it was published—Irish text, translation, and notes—in seven large volumes, by Hodges and Smith of Dublin (now Hodges, Figgis, and Company)—the greatest and most important work on Ireland ever issued by any Irish publisher.

A book of annals called the **Psalter of Cashel** was compiled by Cormac Mac Cullenan; but this has been lost. Besides annals in the Irish language, there are also Annals of Ireland in Latin, such as those of Clyn, Dowling, Pembridge, Multifarnham, &c., most of which have been published by the Archæological and Celtic Society.

#### 4. *Histories : Genealogies : Dinnsenchus.*

**Histories.**—None of the writers of old times conceived the plan of writing a general History of Ireland: it was only in the seventeenth century that anything like this was attempted. But the old Irish writers left many very good Histories of particular transactions, districts, persons, or periods, all in the form of Historic Tales and mixed up with fabulous relations. Of these the following may be mentioned as examples—others will be noticed in next chapter. The **History of the War of the Gaels with**

\* See Petrie's account of all this in O'Donovan's Introduction to the Four Masters, vol. i.

the Galls or Danes ; the **History of the Borumean Tribute** ; the **Wars of Thomond**, written in 1459 by Rory MacGrath, a historian of Thomond or Clare. Of these the first has been published, with translation, introduction, and annotations, by Dr. James Henthorn Todd. The "Tribute" has been translated and edited by Dr. Stokes in the *Revue Celtique* (vol. xiii.), and by Dr. Standish Hayes O'Grady in his "*Silva Gadelica*."



FIG. 133.

Tubbrid Church, the burial-place of Geoffrey Keating, as it appeared in 1845. (From Mrs. Hall's *Ireland*.) The exact spot in this graveyard where he is interred is not known ; but there is a Latin inscription on a tablet over the door of the church (seen in the illustration), of which the following is a translation : "Pray for the souls of the Rev. Father Eugene Duhuy, vicar of Tubbrid, and of the learned Doctor Keating, the founders of this church, and also for the souls of all others, whether priests or laymen, whose bodies lie in this same churchyard."

The first History of the whole country was the **Forus Feasa ar Erin**, or History of Ireland—from the most ancient times to the Anglo-Norman invasion, written by Dr. Geoffrey Keating, a learned Roman Catholic priest of Tubbrid in Tipperary, who died in 1644. Keating was deeply versed in the ancient language and literature of Ireland ; and his History, though uncritical and containing much that is fabulous and legendary, is very interesting

and valuable for its quaint descriptions of ancient Irish life and manners, and because it contains many quotations and condensations from authorities now lost. The work was translated in 1726 by Dermot O'Connor; but he wilfully departed from his text, and his translation is utterly wrong and misleading: "Keating's History"—writes Dr. Todd—"is a work which has been greatly "underrated in consequence of the very ignorant and "absurd translation by Mr. Dermot O'Connor."\* A complete and faithful translation by John O'Mahony was published, without the Irish text, in New York in 1866. Complete text and translation, with notes, are now being issued by the Irish texts Society of London, under the editorship of Mr. David Comyn, M.R.I.A., of Dublin, of which one volume has already appeared.

**Genealogies.**—The genealogies of the principal families were most faithfully preserved in ancient Ireland. There were several reasons for their anxiety to preserve their pedigrees, one very important motive being that in the case of dispute about property or about election to a chiefship, the decision often hinged on the descent of the disputants; and the written records, certified by a properly qualified historian, were accepted as evidence in the Brehon Law courts. Each king and chief had in his household a *Shanachie* or historian, an officer held in high esteem, whose duty it was to keep a written record of all the ancestors and of the several branches of the family. The king's *Shanachie* should be an ollave (p. 65, *supra*).† Sometimes in writing down these genealogies the direction was downward from some distinguished progenitor, of whom all the most important descendants are given, with intermarriages and other incidents of the family. Sometimes again the pedigree is given upwards, the person's

\* Todd, St. Patrick, p. 133, note.

† O'Curry, MS. Mat., 204. A list of the shanachies of several noble families may be seen in the same work, p. 219.

father, grandfather, &c., being named, till the chief from whom the family derived their surname is arrived at, or some ancestor whose position in the genealogical tree is well known, when it becomes unnecessary to proceed farther. In the time of the Plantations and during the operation of the penal laws, the vast majority of the Irish chiefs and of the higher classes in general were driven from their lands and homes; and they and their descendants falling into poverty, lost their pedigrees, so that now only very few families in Ireland are able to trace their descent.

Many of the ancient genealogies are preserved in the Books of Leinster, Lecan, Ballymote, &c. But the most important collection of all is the **Book of Genealogies** compiled in the years 1650 to 1666 in the College of St. Nicholas in Galway, by Duaid Mac Firbis, the last and most accomplished native master of the history, laws, and language of Ireland.

The confidence of the learned public in the ancient Irish genealogies is somewhat weakened by the fact that they—like those of the Britons and some other nations—profess to trace the descent of the several noble families from Adam—joining the Irish pedigrees on to the Scriptural genealogy of Magog the son of Japhet, from whom Irish historians claim that all the ancient colonists of Ireland were descended. But passing this by as of little consequence, and coming down to historic times, the several genealogies, as well as those scattered portions of them found incidentally in various authors, exhibit marvellous consistency and have all the marks of truthfulness. Moreover they receive striking confirmation from incidental references in English writers—as for instance the Venerable Bede. Whenever Bede mentions a Scot or Irishman and says he was the son of so-and-so, it is invariably found that he agrees with the Irish genealogies if they mention the man's name at all.



The following three tracts (already mentioned, p. 17), from the manuscript genealogical books, have been printed, with translations and most copious and valuable notes and illustrations by Dr. John O'Donovan, for the Irish Archæological and Celtic Society :—An account of "**The Tribes and Customs of Hy Fiachrach**" in Connaught, from Duaid Mac Firbis's Book of Genealogies ; a similar account of "**The Tribes and Customs of Hy Maine**" [Mainy], from the Book of Lecan ; and from the same book the **Genealogy** of a Munster tribe named **Corcalee**. And the genealogies of numerous Irish and Scottish families have been printed in various Irish publications, all from the Irish manuscript books. A large number of them will be found in the Rev. John Shearman's "*Loca Patriciana*."

**Dinnsenchus**.—In this place may be mentioned the *Dinnsenchus*, a topographical tract in Middle Irish, prose and verse, giving the legendary history and the etymology of the names of remarkable hills, mounds, caves, carns, cromlechs, raths, duns, plains, lakes, rivers, fords, estuaries, islands, and so forth. It takes its name from *dind* or *dinn*, 'a fortified hill,' and *senchus*, 'a history.' The stories are mostly fictitious—invented to suit the several really existing names : nevertheless this tract is of the utmost value for elucidating the topography and antiquities of the country. Copies of it are found in several of the old Irish books of miscellaneous literature, of which the Book of Leinster contains the oldest version. Various portions of it have been published by Petrie in his *Essay on Tara*, by Crowe in the *Kilk. Arch. Journ.*, 1872-3 ; by Stokes in *Rev. Celt.*, xv. and xvi., and in *Folklore*, iii. and iv. ; and by Gwynn, in the Todd Lecture Series, Royal Irish Academy. Another very important tract about the names of remarkable Irish persons, called *Cóir Annmann* ('Fitness of Names'), corresponding with the *Dinnsenchus* for place-names, has been published with translation by Dr. Stokes in *Irische Texte*, iii.



FIG. 134.—Sculpture on a Column, Church of the Monastery, Glendalough.  
(From Petrie's *Round Towers*, 26a.)

## CHAPTER XV

### HISTORICAL AND ROMANTIC TALES

#### SECTION I. *Classes, Lists, and Numbers.*



VEN from the most remote times, beyond the ken of history, the Irish people, like those of other countries, had stories, which, before the introduction of the art of writing, were transmitted orally, and modified, improved, and enlarged as time went on, by successive *seanchuide* [shanachie], or 'storytellers.' They began to be written down when writing became general: and a careful examination\* of their structure, and of the language in which they are written, has led to the conclusion that the main tales assumed their present forms in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries; while the originals from which they sprang are much older. "It is probable"—writes M. Dottin†—"that the most ancient pieces of the "epic literature of Ireland were written before the middle of "the seventh century: but how long previously they had "been preserved by oral tradition—this is a point that it is

\* By Zimmer and De Jubainville: see Nutt, *Cuchulainn*, the Irish Achilles, pp. 3, 29, 31: De Jubainville, *La Civil, des Celtes*, 137. See also *Voyage of Bran*, I., Introd. xvi: and *Rev. Celt.*, VIII. 47.

† *La Litt. Gael. de l'Irlande*, p. 68.

“difficult to determine.” Once they began to be written down, a great body of romantic and historical written literature rapidly accumulated, consisting chiefly of prose tales.

But of these original transcripts not a line remains : the manuscript books that contained them were all destroyed by the Danes, or in the disturbed times of the Anglo-Norman invasion, as already stated (p. 489). Of many of the tales, however, we have, in the Book of the Dun Cow, and the Book of Leinster, copies made in the eleventh and twelfth centuries : and there are numerous others in manuscripts copied by various scribes from that period to the present century, many of them from original volumes older than the Book of the Dun Cow, and existing when the several copyists wrote, but since lost.

Another point bearing on the antiquity of our Irish tales is this :—that many of them correspond with tales in the ancient Romantic Literature of Greece and the East. Thus, to mention one out of many : our legend of Dermot O'Dyna\* corresponds with the Greek story of Adonis, both heroes being distinguished for beauty, and both being killed by a boar. Even their names O'Dyna (Irish *O'Duibne*) and *Adonis* look as if they had come from the same original. Those of the tales that correspond in this manner must have had their origin prior to the separation of the races centuries before the Christian era.†

In the Book of Leinster there is a very interesting List of the classes to which the ancient historical tales belong, with a number of individual tales named under each class as examples, numbering altogether 187, which has been printed by O'Curry in his Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Irish History, p. 584. Another similar Class-

\* For which see Old Celtic Romances (p. 274) : The Pursuit of Dermot and Grainne.

† See the paper on Remarkable Correspondence of Irish, Greek, and Oriental Legends, by the Rev. James O'Laverty, in *Ulst. Journ. of Arch.*, vii. 334. See also Dr. Whitley Stokes : *Rev. Celt.*, v. 232.

List has been published in the Proc. R. I. Academy (for 1870-76), p. 215, by Mr. Brian O'Looney, from a Trinity College MS. : and a third short one appears in the first volume of the Brehon Laws, p. 47.\* Many classes and tales are common to the whole of these Lists ; but each contains some not found in the others. The following Class-List is made up from a comparison and combination of all.

The stories belonging to some of the classes were called **Prime** or **Chief Stories** (*Prim-scéil*), and those of the rest **Minor Stories** (*Fo-seéil*). It is stated in all the Lists that only the four highest grades of poets (Ollave, Anruth, Cli, Cana : pp. 430-4, *supra*) were permitted to tell both the prime and the minor stories : the lower grades were confined to the chief stories.

Classes of Prime Stories :—1. Battles : 2. *Imrama*, Navigations, or Voyages† : 3. Tragedies : 4. Adventures : 5. Cattle-raids (or Preyings) : 6. Hostings or Military Expeditions : 7. Courtships : 8. Elopements : 9. Caves or Hidings (*i.e.* adventures of persons hiding for some reason in caves or other remote places) : 10. Destructions (of palaces, &c.) : 11. Sieges or Encampments : 12. Feasts : 13. Slaughters.

Classes of Minor Stories : 14. Pursuits : 15. Visions : 16. Exiles, or Banishments : 17. Lake Eruptions.

We have in our old books stories belonging to every one of these classes : but of the individual tales named in the detailed Lists, at least one-half have been lost. The

\* Still another will be found in M. De Jubainville's Catalogue de la Litt. Epique de l'Irlande, pp. 259-264.

† Of all the various classes the *Imrama* or Voyages were the most celebrated, and had most influence on European literature : and next to these the Visions. Latin versions of the Voyage of St. Brendan, as well as versions in several European living languages, were common in every country in Europe all through the Middle Ages : and there is scarcely a Continental library that does not now contain one or more of these versions. The reader may consult Father O'Donohue's *Brendaniana* for a full account of this " Voyage " and its literature. The *Imrama* have been examined with great learning and research by Zimmer and De Jubainville : of whose labours a good account will be found in Mr. Nutt's *Voyage of Bran*, I. 161, with full documentary references. See also p. 230, same vol.



original List from which all our present Lists were drawn, was, in the opinion of M. D'Arbois de Jubainville,\* written in the seventh century. In the same author's "Catalogue de la Littérature Epique de l'Irlande" (mentioned farther on), he has published the titles of about 550 separate tales in prose or poetry or both, of which, according to the estimate of Professor Kuno Meyer, in the Preface to his "Liadain and Curithir," about 400 are still preserved in mss. These might be supplemented—Dr. Meyer continues in the same Preface—by at least 100 others that have come to light since the publication of the Catalogue, and by a further number in mss. still unexplored, thus bringing up the number still existing to between 500 and 600.†

As to the language of the Tales. The old scribes, when copying a tale, often modernised the phraseology of the antique prose to that of their own time: but the poetry, being constructed in accordance with complicated prosodial rules (for which see vol. II., p. 497, *infra*) could not be altered without disarranging the delicate structure.‡ Accordingly the scribes generally let it alone, copying it as they found it; and for this reason the verse passages are generally more archaic and difficult to understand than the prose. Most of the tales, as already remarked, have fallen under Christian influences, and contain allusions to Christian doctrines and practices, inserted by the Christian copyists, mostly monks: but some have escaped this and are thoroughly pagan in character, without the least trace of Christianity. For those monks were liberal and broadminded, and whenever they could—consistently with what they considered their duty—they retained the old pagan allusions untouched. (See also p. 13, *supra*.)

\* Cours de Litt. Celt., vi. 35: see also Voyage of Bran, i. 130: and Hyde, Lit. Hist., chapters xxii.—xxxi.

† As to the total number of individual Tales, see also Miss Hull, Saga, Introd., xxxviii–ix.

‡ On this see Zimmer in Rev. Celt., xiii. 179.

The copyists modernised in other ways. They often altered the descriptions of antique customs and equipments so as to bring them into conformity with their own times. A notable example of this is the influence of the Danish wars of the ninth and tenth centuries. It is now generally admitted that before the arrival of the Danes, the Irish did not use coats of mail or metallic helmets, despising such things as unmanly. But they were forced to adopt them—at least partially—when they found themselves pitted against the Danes ; and to some small extent they kept to the usage afterwards, so that, though they never took heartily to armour and helmets, they were quite familiar with their use (see p. 122, *supra*). Accordingly in many or most of the copies of the Red Branch Knights Tales made in the ninth and succeeding centuries (i.e. *after* the arrival of the Danes), Cuculainn and other heroes are represented as wearing metallic helmets and mail, though in a few versions we find no mention of these defensive arms. A distinguished Continental scholar, Prof. Zimmer,\* has made use of this as a means to distinguish between pre-Danish and post-Danish versions of the same story : assuming that those recensions that make no mention of armour are unaltered copies of versions written before the ninth century.

## 2. *Chronological Cycles of the Tales.*

Most of the Irish Tales fall under four main cycles of History and Legend, which, in all the Irish poetical and romantic literature, were kept quite distinct :—

1. The Mythological Cycle, the stories of which are concerned with the mythical colonies preceding the Milesians, especially the Dedannans. The heroes of the Tales belonging to this cycle, who are assigned to periods long before the Christian era, are gods, namely the gods

\* In *Zeitschrift für Deutsches Alterthum*, xxxii.

that chiefly constitute the mythology of the pagan Irish. These tales are much less numerous and less consecutive than those of the next two cycles.

2. The Cycle of Concobar Mac Nessa and his Red Branch Knights, who flourished in the first century.

3. The Cycle of the Fena of Erin, belonging to a period two centuries later than those of the Red Branch. The Red Branch Knights and the Fena of Erin have been already fully described.

4. Stories founded on events that happened after the dispersal of the Fena (in the end of the third century, p. 89, *supra*), such as the Battle of Moyrath (A.D. 637), most of the Visions, &c. There are some tales however that do not come under any of these categories.

The stories of the Red Branch Knights form the finest part of our ancient Romantic Literature. The most celebrated of all these is the **Táin-bo-Cuailnge** [Quelnè], the epic of Ireland. *Medb* [Maive] queen of Connaught, who resided in her palace of Croghan—still remaining in ruins near the village of Rathcroghan in the north of Roscommon—having cause of quarrel with an Ulster chief, set out with her army for Ulster on a plundering expedition, attended by all the great heroes of Connaught, and by an Ulster contingent who had enlisted in her service. She was accompanied by her husband King Ailill, who however plays a very subordinate part : the strong-minded queen is the leading character all through. The invading army entered that part of Ulster called *Cuailnge* or Quelnè, the principality of the hero Cuculainn, the north part of the present county Louth. At this time the Ulstermen were under a spell of feebleness, all but Cuculainn, who had to defend single-handed the several fords and passes, in a series of single combats, against Maive's best champions, in all of which he was victorious. She succeeded in this first raid, and brought away a great brown bull—which was the chief motive of the expedi-

tion—with flocks and herds beyond number. At length the Ulstermen, having been freed from the spell, attacked and routed the Connaught army. The battles, single combats, and other incidents of this war, which lasted for several years, form the subject of the *Táin*, which consists of one main epic story with about thirty shorter tales grouped round it.

Mr. Alfred Nutt (in his “Cuchulainn, the Irish Achilles,” p. 2) estimates that the whole of the literature of the Red Branch Knights that we possess—never counting one piece twice—would occupy about 2000 8vo printed pages. Some of the chief Red Branch Knights that figure in these tales have been already named (p. 84, *supra*).

Of the Cycle of Finn and the Fena of Erin we have a vast collection of stories. The chief heroes under Finn, who figure in the tales, were:—Oisín or Ossian, his son, the renowned hero-poet to whom the bards attribute—but we know erroneously—many poems still extant; Oscar the brave and gentle, the son of Ossian; Dermot O'Dyna, unconquerably brave, of untarnished honour, generous and self-denying, the finest character in all Irish literature, perhaps the finest in any literature; Goll Mac Morna, the mighty leader of the Connaught Fena; Cailte Mac Ronan the swift-footed; Conan Mail or Conan the Bald, large-bodied, foul-tongued, boastful, cowardly, and gluttonous. The characters of all these are maintained with great spirit and consistency throughout the stories.

The Tales of the Fena, though not so old as those of the Red Branch Knights, are still of great antiquity: for some of them are found in the Book of the Dun Cow and in the Book of Leinster, copied from older volumes; and they are often mentioned in Cormac's Glossary—ninth or tenth century. The quantity of this literature contained in these old books is however small. According to Mr. Nutt, in his “Ossian and the Ossianic Literature” (p. 8), it might fill a hundred pages such as this now under the



reader's eye—for the stories are scrappy and very briefly told. Mr. Nutt believes, however, that before the eleventh century there must have existed a large body of complete tales, all of which have perished. But a vast amount of Ossianic stories, both in prose and verse, is contained in later mss., composed and transcribed from time to time down to the beginning of the last century. The brief tales contained in the older mss. form the germs of the later and more elaborate stories.

M. H. D'Arbois de Jubainville has published, in his "*Littérature Epique de l'Irlande*" (the Epic Literature of Ireland), a most useful catalogue of ancient Irish romantic tales, with the several libraries and manuscripts in which they are to be found: a work which is quite indispensable to every student of Irish romantic literature. For a good and most useful survey of this ancient literature the reader is referred to Mr. Alfred Nutt's "*The Voyage of Bran*," vol. i., pp. 115 *et seq.*

### 3. *General Character of the Tales.*

"Some of the tales are historical, *i.e.* founded on historical events—history embellished with some fiction; while others are altogether fictitious—pure creations of the imagination. But it is to be observed that even in the fictitious tales, the main characters are nearly always historical, or such as were considered so. The old Shana-chies wove their fictions round Concobar Mac Nessa and his Red Branch Knights, or Finn and his Fena, or Luga of the long arms and his Dedannans, or Conn the Hundred fighter, or Cormac Mac Art; like the Welsh legends of Arthur and his Round Table, or the Arabian Romances of Haroun al Raschid. The greater number of the tales are in prose, but some are in verse; and in many of the prose tales the leading characters are often made to express themselves in verse, or some striking incident of the story is related in a poetical form. These

“verse fragments are mostly quotations from an older  
“poetical version of the same tale.”\*

From this great body of stories it would be easy to select a large number, powerful in conception and execution, high and dignified in tone and feeling, all inculcating truthfulness and manliness, many of them worthy to rank with the best literature of their kind in any language. The Stories of the Sons of Usna, the Children of Lir, the Fingal Ronain, the Voyage of Maeldune, Da Derga's Hostel, the Boroma, and the Fairy Palace of the Quicken Trees, are only a few instances in point.

As to the general moral tone of the ancient Irish tales : it is to be observed that in all early literatures, Irish among the rest, sacred as well as profane, there is much plain speaking of a character that would now be considered coarse, and would not be tolerated in our present social and domestic life. But on the score of morality and purity the Irish tales can compare favourably with the corresponding literature of other countries ; and they are much freer from objectionable matter than the works of many of those early English and Continental authors which are now regarded as classics. Taken as a body they are at least as pure as Shakespeare's Plays ; and the worst of them contain very much less grossness than some of the Canterbury Tales. Dr. Whitley Stokes, in his Preface to the “ Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel,” speaks with good reason of the “ pathos and beauty ” of that fine story ; and his remarks on the series of short stories in the *Acallamh na Seanorach*, or “ Colloquy with the Ancient Men,” deserve to be quoted in full :—“ The tales are “generally told with sobriety and directness : they evince “genuine feeling for natural beauty, a passion for music, “a moral purity, singular in a mediæval collection of “stories, a noble love for manliness and honour. Some

\* Old Celtic Romances, Pref., p. iv.

“ of them seem to me admirable for their unstudied “ pathos.”\* On the same point Professor Kuno Meyer† justly remarks :—The “ literature of no nation is free from “ occasional grossness ; and considering the great antiquity “ of Irish literature, and the primitive life which it reflects, “ what will strike an impartial observer most is not its “ license or coarseness, but rather the purity, loftiness, and “ tenderness which pervade it.”

Irish Romantic Literature is intimately interwoven with native Topography, as much so at least as that of Greece or Rome, and much more so than the German or Norse Tales. Some particular spots, residences, or monuments are assigned as the scenes of almost all the battles, feasts, burials, or other memorable events ; and the chief places through which armies on the march passed are laid down with great precision.‡ Most of those places, as well as the residences of the kings and great heroes of the olden time, are known to this day, and not only retain their old names, but are marked by such monumental remains as might be expected : of which many examples will be found in various parts of this book.

#### 4. *Story-telling and Recitation.*

The tales were brought into direct touch with the people, not by reading—for there were few books outside libraries, and few people were able to read them—but by recitation : and the Irish of all classes, like the Homeric Greeks, were excessively fond of hearing tales and poetry recited. There were, as we have seen, professional shanachies and poets whose duty it was to know by heart numerous old tales, poems, and historical pieces, and to recite them, at festive gatherings, for the entertainment of the chiefs and their guests : and it has

\* *Irische Texte*, iv., Pref. xii.

† In the Preface to his “ *Liadain and Cuirithir*.”

‡ On this special point, see Miss Hull’s “ *Cuchullin Saga*,” Appendix II., p. 301, and the map prefixed to the work.

been already observed that every intelligent person was supposed to know a reasonable number of them, so as to be always ready to take a part in amusing and instructing his company. The tales of those times correspond with the novels and historical romances of our own day, and served a purpose somewhat similar. Indeed they served a much higher purpose than the generality of our novels ; for in conjunction with poetry they were the chief agency in education—education in the best sense of the word—a real healthful informing exercise for the intellect. As remarked elsewhere they conveyed a knowledge of history and geography, and they inculcated truthful and honourable conduct. Moreover this education was universal ; for though few could read, the knowledge and recitation of poetry and stories reached the whole body of the people.\* The *racaire* [rackera] or reciter generally sang the poetical parts of the tale to the music of a harp, when a harp was at hand and when he was able to play, as stated at p. 445, *supra*.

“ This ancient institution of story-telling held its ground “ both in Ireland and in Scotland down to a very recent “ period ; and it is questionable if it is even yet quite “ extinct. Within my own memory, this sort of entertain- “ ment was quite usual among the farming classes of the “ south of Ireland. The family and workmen, and any “ neighbours that chose to drop in, would sit round the “ kitchen fire after the day’s work—or perhaps gather in a “ barn on a summer or autumn evening—to listen to some “ local shanachie reciting one of his innumerable Gaelic “ tales.”† In old times people were often put to sleep by a shanachie reciting a tale in a drowsy monotonous sort of recitative.‡

\* For the educational function of the tales, see also pp. 418, 426, *supra*.

† See Pref. to Old Celtic Romances, from which the above extract is taken : and Preface to Carmichael’s *Carmina Gadelica*.

‡ See O’Grady, *Silva Gad.* : Pref. xxi, par. v.



### 5. *Translations and Versions in Modern Languages.*

Much of this ancient Romantic Literature has been recently translated. The Battle of Moylena and the Battle of Moyrath are the subjects of two historic tales, both of which have been published, the former edited by O'Curry and the latter by O'Donovan, both with valuable notes. What are called the "Three Tragic Stories of Erin," viz., the Fate of the Children of Lir, the Fate of the Sons of Usna, and the Fate of the Sons of Turenn, have been published in the *Atlantis*, translated and edited by O'Curry; who also translated the Sick-bed of Cuchulainn in the same periodical. Some few others have been published with translations in the *Kilkenny Archæological Journal*, and in the *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*.

In the *Revue Celtique*, *Irische Texte*, *Zeitschrift für Celt. Phil.*, *Folklore*, and other periodicals, both British and Continental, a great number have been translated by Dr. Whitley Stokes and by Prof. Kuno Meyer. Several have also been translated into French and German by Windisch, D'Arbois de Jubainville, Zimmer, and others. The Irish Texts Society of London have published the *Feast of Bricriu*, with English translation; which however had been previously translated into French by M. De Jubainville in his "*L'Épopée Celtique en Irlande*," and into German by Dr. Windisch in *Ir. Texte*, vol. ii. In Dr. Hayes O'Grady's "*Silva Gadelica*" are text and translation of twenty-seven. Six volumes of tales, chiefly of the Cycle of Finn, have been published with translations by the Ossianic Society. The best of them is "*The Pursuit of Dermot and Grania*," which has been literally translated by Standish Hayes O'Grady. Miss Eleanor Hull has given a good abstract of the Red Branch Knights tales in her book, "*The Cuchullinn Saga*." I have myself published in my "*Old Celtic Romances*" free translations—without texts—of thirteen ancient tales (including Dermot

and Grania above-mentioned). A translation, on similar lines, of "The Fate of the Sons of Usna" has been lately included in the same book. Lady Gregory has told the principal stories of the Red Branch Knights in simple, quaint English—following pretty closely on the originals—in her "Cuchulain of Muirthemne." All these will be found mentioned in the List of Authorities at the end of this book. Translations and versions still continue to appear, showing no signs of falling off, but rather a tendency to increase.\*

Already a good beginning has been made in the creation of a modern literature founded on these ancient sagas. Five English poetical epics have been published, founded on five of them :—"Congal," on the Battle of Moyrath, and "Conary," on the Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel, both by Sir Samuel Ferguson; "The Foray of Queen Meave," on the Táin-bo-Quehnè, by Mr. Aubrey de Vere; and "Deirdre," on the Fate of the Sons of Usna, and "Blaid," on the Death of Curoi Mac Dara, both by my brother Dr. Robert Dwyer Joyce. When Tennyson read for the first time the adventures of Maeldune, in "Old Celtic Romances," he made it the subject of a beautiful poem, which he called "The Voyage of Maeldune." And there exist still, in this fine old literature, ample materials untouched. The harvest is abundant, but the labourers are wanted.

\* Of the whole of the five or six hundred ancient Irish Tales, Prof. Kuno Meyer, in the Preface to his "Liadain and Curithir," estimates that about 150 have been, so far, published with translations.



FIG. 135.—One form of Irish Ornament.



FIG. 135.—Sculpture on Chancel Arch, Monastery Church, Glendalough.  
(From Petrie's Round Towers, 1845.)

## CHAPTER XVI

### ART

#### SECTION I. *Penwork and Illumination.*



ART, in some of its branches, was cultivated, as we shall see, in Pagan Ireland; but it attained its highest perfection in Christian times. In its Christian connexion it began to flourish early. We know that St. Patrick, in the fifth century, kept, as part of his household, smiths, braziers, and other artists. St. Daig or Dagoeus (d. A.D. 587), who is mentioned farther on, was a *scriptor librorum peritissimus*, 'a most skilful writer of books,' and was equally celebrated as a metal-work artist; and St. Ultan (7th or 8th cent.) was renowned as a *scriptor et pictor librorum peritissimus*, 'a most accomplished writer and illuminator of books.'\* In Ireland art was practised chiefly in four different branches:—Ornamentation and Illumination of Manuscript-books; Metal-work; Stone-carving; and Building. In leather-work also the Irish artists attained to great skill, as we may see in several exquisite specimens of book-binding still preserved, of which two are figured at pp. 32 and 488, *supra*. Art in general reached its highest perfection in the period between the end of the ninth and the beginning

\* Keller in Ulst. Journ. Arch., VIII. 223, 224: Miss Stokes, Art, p. 28.

of the twelfth century.\* Penwork seems to have somewhat outstripped its sister arts ; for some of the finest examples of ornamental penmanship and illumination still preserved belong to the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries.

The special style of pen ornamentation which, in its most advanced stage, is quite characteristic of the Celtic people of Ireland, was developed in the course of centuries by successive generations of artists who brought it to marvellous perfection. It was mainly, though not exclusively, the work of ecclesiastics, and it was executed for the most part in monasteries. Its most marked characteristic is interlaced work formed by bands, ribbons, and cords, which are curved and twisted and interwoven in the most intricate way, something like basketwork infinitely varied in pattern. These are intermingled and alternated with zigzags, waves, spirals, and lozenges ; while here and there among the curves are seen the faces or forms of dragons, serpents, or other strange-looking animals, their tails or ears or tongues not unfrequently elongated and woven till they become merged and lost in the general design ; and sometimes human faces, or full figures of men or of angels. But vegetable forms are very rare. This ornamentation was commonly used in the capital letters, which are generally very large : one capital of the Book of Kells covers a whole page. The pattern is often so minute and complicated as to require the aid of a magnifying glass to examine it. The penwork is throughout illuminated in brilliant colours, in preparing the materials of which the scribes were as skilful as in making their ink (p. 479, *supra*) : for in some of the old books the colours, especially the red, are even now very little faded after the lapse of so many centuries. The several colours were differently prepared. The yellow was laid on thin and transparent. The red was mixed with a gummy substance that pre-

\* See Dr. William Stokes's *Life of Petrie*, chap. viii.



vented it from sinking in, and in great measure from fading : while others have a thick body of some skilfully prepared material.\*

The Book of Kells, a vellum manuscript of the Four Gospels in Latin, is the most beautifully written book in existence. The first notice of it occurs in the *Annals*, at 1006, where it is recorded that "the great Gospel of Columkille"—"the principal relic of the western world, on account of its unequalled cover," was stolen out of the sacristy at Kells (in Meath). It was found soon after ; but the thief had removed the gold cover. Its exact age is unknown ; but judging from the style of the penmanship and from other internal evidence, we may conclude that it was probably written in the seventh or early in the eighth century. Each verse begins with an ornamental capital ; and upon these capitals, which are nearly all differently designed, the artist put forth his utmost efforts. Miss Stokes, who has carefully examined the Book of Kells, thus speaks of it :—"No effort hitherto made to transcribe any one page of this book has the perfection of execution and rich harmony of colour which belongs to this wonderful book. It is no exaggeration to say that, as with the microscopic works of nature, the stronger the magnifying power brought to bear upon it, the more is this perfection seen. No single false interlacement or uneven curve in the spirals, no faint trace of a trembling hand or wandering thought can be detected. This is the very passion of labour and devotion, and thus did the Irish scribe work to glorify his book."†

Professor J. O. Westwood of Oxford, who examined the best specimens of ancient penwork all over Europe, speaks even more strongly. In his little work on the Book of Kells, he writes :—"It is the most astonishing

\* From the German scholar, Dr. Keller, in *Ulst. Journ. of Arch.*, viii. 221 : see also Miss Stokes, *Early Christian Art*, 11, 12.

† Miss Stokes, *Early Christian Architecture*, 127.





[Fac-simile of one page of the Book of Mac Durnan, exactly as it left the hand of the Irish scribe, A.D. 850. The words, which are much contracted, are the beginning of the Gospel of Saint Mark, in Latin. For further reference to this frontispiece, see pp. 14 493, 494.—From Westwood's *Fac-sim. of Ang.-Sax. and Irish MSS.*]

book of the Four Gospels which exists in the world " (p. 5) : " How men could have had eyes and tools to work " them [the designs] out, I am sure I, with all the skill and " knowledge in such kind of work which I have been exercising for the last fifty years, cannot conceive " (p. 10). " I know pretty well all the libraries in Europe where such " books as this occur, but there is no such book in any of " them ; . . . there is nothing like it in all the books which " were written for Charlemagne and his immediate successors " (p. 11).

Speaking of the minute intricacy and faultless execution of another Irish book, Mr. Westwood says :—" I have " counted [with a magnifying glass] in a small space " scarcely three quarters of an inch in length by less than " half an inch in width, in the Book of Armagh, no less than " 158 interlacements of a slender ribbon pattern formed of " white lines edged with black ones." The Book of Durrow and the Book of Armagh, both in Trinity College, Dublin ; the Book of Mac Durnan, in the Lambeth Library ; the Stowe Missal in the R. I. Academy ; and the Garland of Howth in Trinity College—all written in the 7th, 8th, and 9th centuries—are splendidly ornamented and illuminated ; and of the Book of Armagh, some portions of the penwork surpass even the finest parts of the Book of Kells.\*

Giraldus Cambrensis, when in Ireland in 1185, saw a copy of the Four Gospels in St. Brigit's nunnery in Kildare which so astonished him that he has recorded—in a separate chapter of his book—a legend that it was written under the direction of an angel. His description would exactly apply now to the Book of Kells. But in those

\* Many of the most beautiful pages and letters of the Book of Kells, as well as of numerous other ancient Irish manuscripts, have been reproduced by Sir John T. Gilbert, LL.D., in the Facsimiles of National Manuscripts of Ireland (in five volumes), which may be seen in the public libraries. Subsequently there appeared a much more extensive series of reproductions of the Book of Kells in fifty photographic plates, published by Hodges & Figgis, of Dublin, edited by the Rev. Dr. Abbott, S.F.T.C.D.





FIG. 132.

Outlines of the illuminated page from the Book of Mac Durnan.

*Latin words with contractions as they stand in the page.*—Initium Aorangelin dñi nři ihu xpi filii dei sicut scrip 3 in esai .pfeta Ecce mitto angelum meum

*Latin words fully written out.*—Initium Aevangelii domini nostri ihesu christi filii dei sicut scriptum est in esai profeta Ecce mitto angelum meum

*Translation.*—The beginning of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ Son of God as it is written in Esaias the prophet Behold I send my angel.

times there were many such books, as indeed is indicated—among other entries—by the record of the Four Masters above. Here the book is singled out for special commendation, not on account of its penwork, but for “its unequalled cover,” implying that the beautiful penmanship was so usual in books at the time as not to need special notice in this particular volume. Giraldus’s words are:—  
“Almost every page is illustrated by drawings illuminated  
“with a variety of brilliant colours. In one page you see  
“the countenance of the Divine Majesty supernaturally  
“pictured; in another the mystic forms of the evangelists:  
“here is depicted the eagle, there the calf: here the face  
“of a man, there of a lion; with other figures in almost  
“endless variety. . . . You will find them [the pictures] so  
“delicate and exquisite, so finely drawn, and the work of  
“interlacing so elaborate, while the colours with which they  
“are illuminated are so blended, that you will be ready to  
“assert that all this is the work of angelic and not of  
“human skill.”\* One can hardly be surprised at Giraldus’s legend; for whoever looks closely into some of the elaborate pages of the Book of Kells—even in the photographic reproductions—will be inclined to wonder how any human head could have designed, or how any human hand could have drawn them. This exquisite art was also practised successfully by the Gaels of Scotland; but the discussion of this does not fall within my province.

The men who produced these books must have worked without the least hesitation or uncertainty, and with unwavering decision, the result of long practice. So far as we know there were then no magnifying glasses: and perhaps it may not be out of place to remark that it was in general only persons with short sight—such people as have now to use concave spectacles—that could follow up for a lifetime this art of minute ornamentation and illumination.

\* Top. Hib., II. xxxviii (Bohn’s ed.).

But this peculiar work did not originate in Ireland. In pagan times indeed the Irish practised a sort of ornamentation consisting of zigzags, lozenges, circles both

single and in concentric groups, spirals of both single and double lines, and other such patterns, which are found among most primitive peoples, and which in Ireland may be seen on bronze and gold ornaments preserved in museums, and on sepulchral stone monuments, such as those at New Grange and Loughcrew.\* Even in those primitive ages, however, they showed much artistic taste and skill. Many small objects, such as horn combs, found under cairns in Loughcrew, are—in the words of Mr. Fergusson†—"engraved by "compass with circles and "curves of a high order of "art": and "on one, in cross-tation of an antlered stag": all executed in pagan times. Specimens of tasteful pagan designs, some of them beautifully executed, may be seen on some of the stone monu-



FIG. 139.

Rock-scrubbing at Newgrange. (From Journ. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Irel. for 1896, p. 49.) These are coarse, but they show the prevailing forms.

ments figured in chap. xxxi., sect. 5; and on the gold ornaments shown in chap. xxii., sect. 3.

\* On this see Mr. Coffey on the Origins of Prehistoric Ornament in Ireland: Journ. Roy. Soc. Antiq., Irel., 1892-1894. † Rude Stone Monuments, 218.

But in all this pre-Christian ornamentation there is not the least trace of interlaced work. This beautiful art originated in the East—in Byzantium after the fall of the first empire—and was brought to Ireland—no doubt by Irish monks—in the early ages of Christianity. In Ireland it continued to be cultivated for centuries, while meantime it died out on the Continent. But remains of the primitive art are to this day preserved in its original home, and in the surrounding countries. “Interlaced patterns and knot-work”—observes Miss Stokes in her “Early Christian Art in Ireland” (p. 33)—“strongly resembling Irish designs, “are commonly met with at Ravenna, in the older churches “of Lombardy, and at Sant’ Abbondio, at Como, and not “unfrequently appear in Byzantine mss., while in the “carvings on the Syrian churches of the second and third “centuries, as well as the early churches of Georgia, such “interlaced ornament is constantly used.”\*

But if the Irish did not originate this art, they made it, as it were, their own, after adopting it, and cultivated it to greater perfection than was ever dreamed of in Byzantium or Italy. Combining the Byzantine interlacings with the familiar pagan designs, they produced a variety of patterns, and developed new and intricate forms of marvellous beauty and symmetry. “Besides all this”—again to quote Miss Stokes—“the interlacings, taken by themselves, “gradually undergo a change in character under the “hand of the Irish artist. They become more inextricable, more involved, more infinitely varied in their “twistings and knottings, and more exquisitely precise “and delicate in execution than they are ever seen to be “on Continental works, so far as my experience goes.” Dr. Ferdinand Keller,† who has made a most careful

\* The reader will find this branch of the subject well and instructively discussed in “Rambles and Studies in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Dalmatia”—pages 280 to 295—with many illustrations, by the well-known Scotch antiquarian, Dr. Robert Munro.

† In his Paper already referred to in note, p. 546, *supra*.



examination of the Continental specimens of Irish calligraphy and illumination, is quite as strongly enthusiastic in his expressions of admiration as Mr. Westwood and Miss Stokes.

It is curious that long after this style of writing and ornamentation had died out on the Continent, it was revived and brought into fashion there again through the influence of the Irish Missionaries. For they carried their beautiful art—improved and almost re-created by their own inventive genius—wherever they went, and taught it to the Anglo-Saxons and Britons in England, and to the people of all those Continental countries they frequented. Mr. Westwood and Dr. Keller both express the opinion that the Irish style of penmanship was generally adopted on the Continent, and continued to prevail there until the revival of art in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. To this day numerous exquisite specimens of the skill and taste of those Irish artists are preserved in the libraries of England, France, Germany, and Italy: of which one lovely example—now in Bavaria—may be seen described and figured by Dr. W. Wattenbach in a Paper written by him in German, and translated into French, in the first volume of *Revue Celtique*.\* One of Dr. Wattenbach's illustrations is copied here by permission of the editor of *Revue Celtique*. Several others, with the full colours restored, will be found in Dr. Keller's Paper above referred to. Through ignorance of the real origin of this beautiful style of writing, ornamenting, and illuminating manuscripts, it was at one time often designated "Celtic" (which is too wide a term), and not unfrequently "Anglo-Saxon" (because it was sometimes found in Anglo-Saxon MSS. written by scribes who had learned from the

\* The French Title of the Paper is:—"Sur un Évangélaire à Miniatures d'Origine Irlandaise, dans la Bibliothèque Princièrre d'Oettingen-Wallerstein" (*Rev. Celt.*, I. 27). This Paper is translated into English, with two illustrations copied, by Miss Stokes, in *Kilk. Archæol. Journal* for 1870-71, p. 352.

Irish) : but now it is universally recognized as Irish, so that it is commonly known as *opus Hibernicum*.

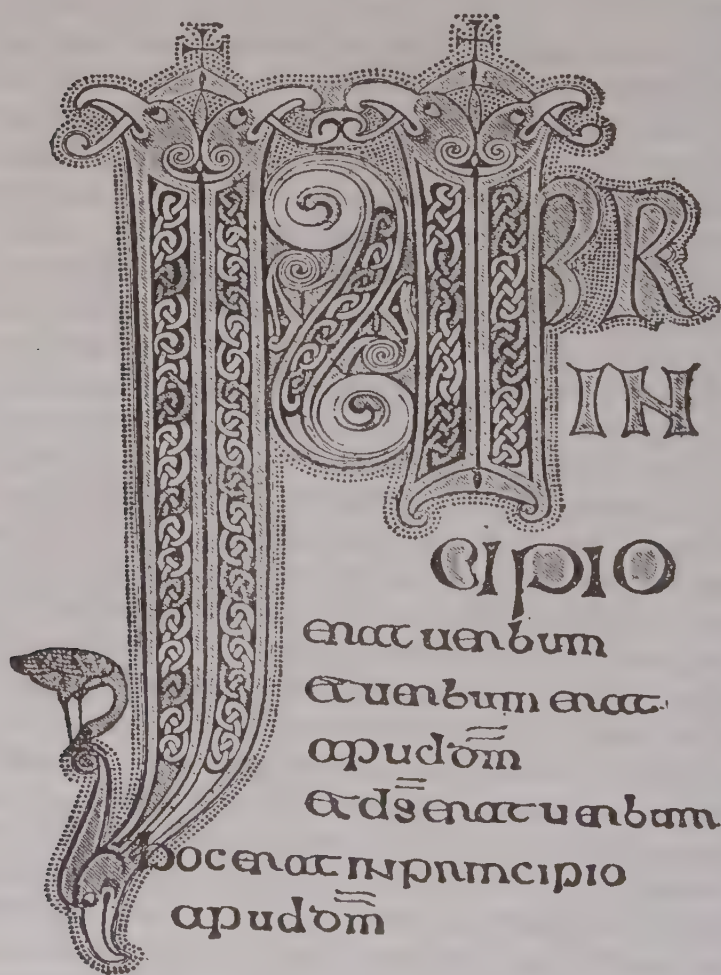


FIG. 140.

The beginning of the Gospel of St. John, from an Irish manuscript Gospel Book now in Bavaria.  
(From Rev. Celt., vol. I. In the original manuscript this is illuminated in colour.)

While the Irish artists evolved from within this unexampled excellence of ornamentation, their attempts at miniature drawing, as well as at sculpturing the human figure, are conventional and imperfect : a circumstance

which will hardly surprise us when we remember that conventionality in figure-drawing and sculpture held the ancient Egyptian artists in slavery for thousands of years, and that their attempts at depicting natural figures and scenes remained artificial and imperfect to the end. But the Irish artists, though their figures were rude, were highly successful in imparting expression to the human face, as may be seen by Petrie's remarks at p. 570, *infra*.

## 2. *Gold, Silver, and Enamel, as Working Materials.*

Before entering on the subject of artistic metal-work, it may be well to say a few words on the two metals chiefly employed—gold and silver—and on the glassy metallic combination—enamel.

**Gold.**—It is certain that gold and silver mines were worked in this country from the most remote antiquity ; and that gold was found anciently in much greater abundance than it has been in recent times. Our oldest traditions record not only the existence of the mines, but also the names of the kings who had them worked, and even those of the artificers. According to the bardic annals, the monarch Tigernmas [Tiernmas] was the first that smelted gold in Ireland, and with it covered drinking-goblets and brooches ; the mines were situated in the *Foithre* [fira], or woody districts, east of the Liffey ; and the artificer was *Uchadan*, who lived in that part of the country.

Whatever amount of truth there may be in this old legend, it proves that the Wicklow gold mines were as well known in the far distant ages of antiquity as they were in the end of the eighteenth century, when the accidental discovery of a few pieces of gold in the bed of a stream revived the long-lost knowledge, and caused such an exciting search for several years. This stream, which is now called the Gold Mine river, flows from the mountain of Croghan Kinshella, and joins the Ovoca near the Wooden Bridge

hotel. On account of the abundance of gold in Wicklow in old times, the people of Leinster sometimes got the name of *Laignig-an-óir* (Lynee-an-ore), the 'Lagenians of the gold.\* But other parts of the country produced gold also, as, for instance, the district of O'Gonneloe near Killaloe, and the neighbourhood of the Moyola river in Derry.† There were gold districts also in Antrim, Tyrone, Dublin, Wexford, and Kildare.‡ In accordance with all this, we have, in the annals, records which show that gold was everywhere within reach of the wealthy, and was used by them in personal decoration and in works of art. Even till late times Ireland produced gold, as well as silver, and exported them. The "Libel of English Policie" (about 1430), p. 199, gives a list of exports, among which "of silver and golde there is the oore" (vol. II., p. 433, *below*): and it goes on to say that the ore was raised from Irish mines, and that it was rich and excellent.

But though the home produce was abundant, it hardly kept pace with the demand; for the higher classes had quite a passion for gold ornaments; and some of our oldest traditions record the importation of gold, and articles of gold; just as horses, cloaks, and bronze articles were imported. For example, we are told in a legend in the Book of Leinster, that Credne, the great Dedannan *caird* or artificer, was drowned while bringing golden ore from Spain.§ A poem in the same old book speaks of "torques of gold from foreign lands";|| and another legend describes a lady's chair as all ablaze with "Alpine gold."¶ These old records are corroborated by Giraldus in a passage implying that there were native gold mines, but the people were too idle to work them effectively—one of

\* O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, I., p. 5.

† Boate, *Nat. Hist.*, 69.

‡ Wilde, *Catal. Gold*, page 4, and note; and pp. 97-100: Kinahan, *Geol. of Irel.*, chap. xxi.

§ O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, II. 210: LL, II, a, 37.

|| O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, II. 182: LL, 49, b, 40.

¶ Silva Gad., 120: *Man & Cust.*, II. 13.



his usual sour indictments : and he then goes on to say—with undoubted truth :—" Even gold, of which they require " large quantities, and which they desire so eagerly, as to " indicate their Spanish origin, is brought hither [from " Spain] by merchants " (Top. Hib. III. x.). In another place he remarks that gold abounds in Ireland.

The general truthfulness of these traditions and records is fully borne out by the great quantities of golden ornaments found in every part of the country, which will be spoken of in vol. II., p. 222. Near the village of Cullen, on the borders of Limerick and Tipperary, there is a bog which has been long celebrated for the quantities of manufactured gold found in it. During the last two centuries innumerable golden articles of various kinds have been dug up from the bottom of this bog, as well as many of the implements used by the old goldsmiths in their work, such as crucibles, bronze ladles, &c. ; from which it is probable, as O'Curry remarks, that this place was anciently—long before the bog was formed, and when the land was clothed with wood—inhabited by a race of goldsmiths, who carried on the manufacture there for generations.\* It may be added that the bog of Cullen is still proverbial all over Munster for its riches :—

" And her wealth it far outshines  
Cullen's bog or Silvermines."†

How much Ireland was richer than Britain in gold is well illustrated by the fact that, while the total weight of the gold ornaments in the British Museum, collected from England, Wales, and Scotland (excluding those from Ireland), is not more than 50 oz., those in the collection in the National Museum in Dublin weigh about 570 oz.‡

\* Man. & Cust., II. 205, *et seq.* For more about ancient workshops, see vol. II. page 320. \*

† The Enchanted Lake, in Crofton Croker's Fairy Legends.

‡ See Mr. George Coffey's Paper, Journ. Soc. Antiqq. Irel., 1895, p. 23. In this Article the weight of the Brit. Mus. gold is given as 20 oz. ; but

Dr. Frazer's Paper in Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad. for 1893-6, p. 779, suggesting that the gold for Irish ornaments was imported from Eastern Russia, and a subsequent paper in the Journ. of the Soc. Antiqq., Ireland (1897, p. 59), assigning Roman gold coins plundered from the Britons as the source of the Irish supply, do not need any serious notice.

**Silver.**—As in the case of gold, we have also very ancient legends about silver. Our old legendary histories tell us that King *Enna Airgthech*, who reigned about a century and a half after *Tigernmas*, was the first that made silver shields in Ireland, which he distributed among his chieftain friends. The legend goes on to say that they were made at a place called *Argetros* or Silverwood, situated at Rathbeagh on the Nore, in Kilkenny, which was said to derive its name from those silver shields. In several parts of the country there are mines of lead mixed with a considerable percentage of silver; one, for instance, at Silvermines in Tipperary. Like gold, silver also appears to have been occasionally imported from Spain. In the house of Gerg there were drinking-bowls with rims ornamented with silver brought from Spain (Leahy, 28).

The Irish word for silver is *airget* [arrigit]: it is a Celtic word cognate with the Lat. *argentum*. Two other native terms for silver, *cimb* and *cerb*, are given in Cormac's Glossary (39, 47) but both had fallen out of use in the tenth century. On account of the abundance of gold, its market value in Ireland compared with that of silver—which was difficult to obtain—was very much less than it is now.\*

Mr. Coffey informs me that a corselet weighing 30 oz, was accidentally omitted. See also Ridgeway, Origin of Currency, Appendix C.

\* For more information about gold and silver, see Brash's article in Kilk. Arch. Journ., 1870-71, p. 509: Hyde, Lit. Hist., chap. xii.; Prof. O'Reilly's Paper on the Milesian Colonisation of Ireland in relation to Gold Mining, in Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad. for 1900: and M. Henri Gaidoz, De l'Exploitation des Métaux en Gaule, in the Revue Archéologique, 1868.

**Enamel and Enamel Work.**—On many of the specimens of metal-work preserved in the National Museum may be seen enamel patterns worked with exquisite skill, showing that the Irish artists were thorough masters of this branch of art. Their enamel was a sort of whitish or yellowish transparent glass as a foundation, coloured with different metallic oxides. It was fused on to the surface of the heated metal, where it adhered, and was worked while soft into various patterns. Red or crimson enamel, which seems to have been a favourite, was called *cruan*, from the Irish word *cru*, ‘blood.’ O’Davoren, a late authority, quoting from older works, vaguely defines *cruan*, ‘a kind of old brazier work.’ In other old glossaries the word is explained *buidhe ocus dearg*, ‘yellow and red,’ as much as to say that *cruan* was of an orange or crimson colour.\*

The art of enamelling was common to the Celtic people of Great Britain and Ireland, in pre-Christian as well as in Christian times; and beautiful specimens have been found in both countries, some obviously Christian, and others, as their designs and other characteristics show, belonging to remote pagan ages. Many objects showing exquisite enamel work, variously coloured, all found in Ireland, have been described, and several of them figured, by Miss Stokes in the article mentioned below. The art was taken up and improved by the Christian artists, who used it in metal-work with the interlaced ornamentation; similar to that in the Book of Kells and other manuscripts.

A few years ago a great block of *cruan* or red enamel weighing 10lb., formed of glass coloured with red oxide of copper—being the raw material intended for future work—was found under one of the raths at Tara, and is now in the National Museum. On this a Paper was contributed to vol. xxx., Transactions of the R. I. Acad., by

\* See V. Ball and Miss Stokes in the Paper mentioned in the text: Bk. of Rights, 267: Stokes in Trip. Life, Introd. cxlvi, note 2: and Dr. William Stokes’s Life of Petrie, 420.

Mr. Valentine Ball, giving the history of the find, along with a description and chemical analysis of the block, followed by a series of "Observations on the use of Red Enamel in Ireland," by Miss Margaret Stokes.

Cruan is often mentioned in the oldest Irish records. For instance, in the story of Bruden Da Derga in the Book of the Dun Cow, we read of "thrice fifty dark grey steeds, with thrice fifty bridles of *cruan* on them."\* As bearing out the correctness of such old descriptions as this, we find in the National Museum portions of bridles and other horse-trappings, most beautifully enamelled in various rich colours, one of which may be seen pictured by Miss Stokes in the above-mentioned Paper, and another in the Kilkenny Archæological Journal, vol. for 1856-57, p. 423. In the Tripartite Life we read that when Bishop Muinis settled in Forgney, St. Patrick left him a cross of (*i.e.* ornamented with) *cruan moithni*, with the four *ardda*, or points-of-the-compass, of *cruan móin*, marked on it.† These of course were different kinds of *cruan*, but beyond this we know nothing. The enamel work of Christian artists is seen in perfection in the Cross of Cong, the Ardagh Chalice, and the Tara Brooch.

### 3. *Artistic Metal Work.*

The pagan Irish, like the ancient Britons, practised from time immemorial—long before the introduction of Christianity—the art of working in bronze, silver, gold, and enamel; an art which had become highly developed in Ireland by the time St. Patrick and his fellow-missionaries arrived. Some of the antique Irish articles made in pagan times show great mastery over metals, and admirable skill in design and execution.‡ This primitive

\* Bruden Da Derga, 51: LU, 85, a, 27 to 32. For more about ornamented bridles, see vol. II. p. 416.

† Trip. Life, 86, 87.

‡ See on this Miss Stokes, *Early Christian Art in Ireland*, pp. 53 to 56. See also description and illustrations of Gold Gorgets in chap. xxii. (vol. II. pp. 233 to 240), *infra*.



art was continued into Christian times, and was brought to its highest perfection in the tenth and eleventh centuries. "As in writing"—says the German scholar Dr. Wattenbach—"so likewise in music, in goldsmith's work of all kinds, and in carving, the Scots [Irish] have been celebrated from olden times, and in those arts they have also been the teachers of the industrious monks of St. Gall."\* Artistic metal work continued to flourish to about the

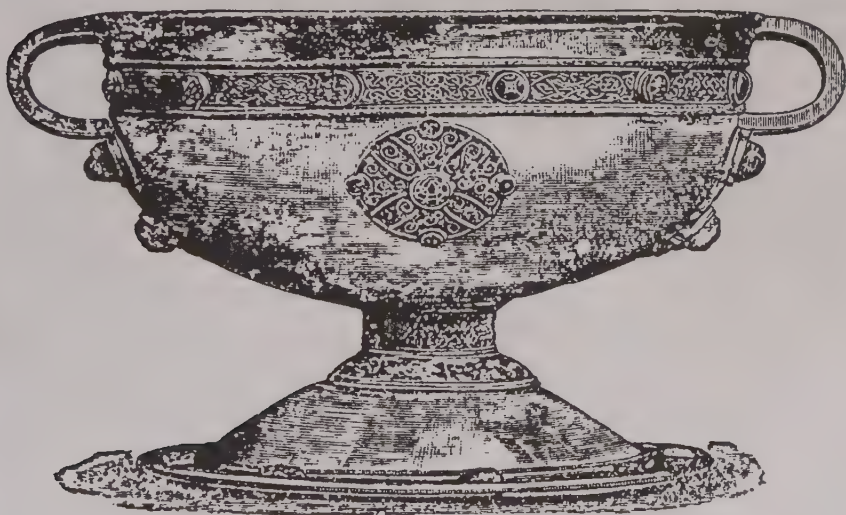


FIG. 141.

The Ardagh Chalice. (From Miss Stokes's *Early Christian Art in Ireland*.) Underneath the ornamental band, near the top, and extending all round the circumference, there is an inscription in square letters, giving the names of the twelve Apostles : but the letters are too delicate to be shown in this illustration.

end of the twelfth century, but gradually declined after that, owing to the general disorganisation of society consequent on the Anglo-Norman Invasion, and to the want of encouragement. A great variety of gold ornaments may be seen in the National Museum, many of beautiful workmanship ; which will be noticed in vol. II., pp. 222-263.

The ornamental designs of metal work executed by Christian artists were generally similar to those used in

\* *Ulst. Journ. Archæol.* VII. 238.

manuscripts (for, as has been observed, interlaced ornamentation, whether in penwork, on stone, or in metals, came in with Christianity), and the execution was distinguished by the same exquisite skill and masterly precision. The pre-Christian artists exercised their skill in making and ornamenting shields ; swords ; sword-hilts ; chariots ; brooches ; bridles, &c., &c. : our oldest records testify to the manufacture of these articles by skilled artists in remote pagan times : and the numerous exquisite specimens of their handiwork in our museums fully corroborate those accounts. In addition to these the Christian artists—who were chiefly, but not exclusively, ecclesiastics\*—made crosses ; crosiers ; chalices ; bells ; brooches ; shrines or boxes to hold books or bells or relics ; and book-satchels, in which the two materials, metal and leather, were used. Specimens of all these—many of them of very remote antiquity—may be seen in the National Museum in Dublin. The three most remarkable, as well as the most beautiful and most elaborately ornamented objects in this museum, are the **Ardagh Chalice**, the **Tara Brooch**, and the **Cross of Cong**, all made by Christian artists. But many of the articles in the Museum, belonging to pagan times, both of gold and of mixed metals, especially the golden gorgets, exhibit elaborate and beautiful workmanship.

The Ardagh Chalice, which is 7 inches high and  $9\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter at top, was found some years ago buried in the ground under a stone in an old *lis* at Ardagh, in the county Limerick. Beyond this nothing is known of its history. It is elaborately ornamented with designs in metal and enamel ; and, judging from its shape and from its admirable workmanship, it was probably made some short time before the tenth century. It is very fully described in a Paper by the late Earl of Dunraven (Feb. 22, 1869) in vol. xxiv. of the *Trans. of the R. I.*

\* See Dr. Wm. Stokes's *Life of Petrie*, chap. viii.

Academy, and in two communications from Dr. W. K. Sullivan, and Mr. Edmond Johnson of Dublin, both included in Lord Dunraven's Paper.



FIG. 142.

The Tara Brooch: front view (pin cut short here to save space). (From Miss Stokes's *Early Christian Art in Ireland*.) The plates with the ornamental designs have been knocked off seven of the little panels.

The Tara brooch was found in 1850 by a child on the strand near Drogheda. It is ornamented all over with amber, glass, and enamel, and with the characteristic Irish filigree or interlaced work in metal. From its style of workmanship it seems obviously contemporaneous with

the Ardagh Chalice.\* In the old Irish romances, we constantly read that the mantle of both men and women was

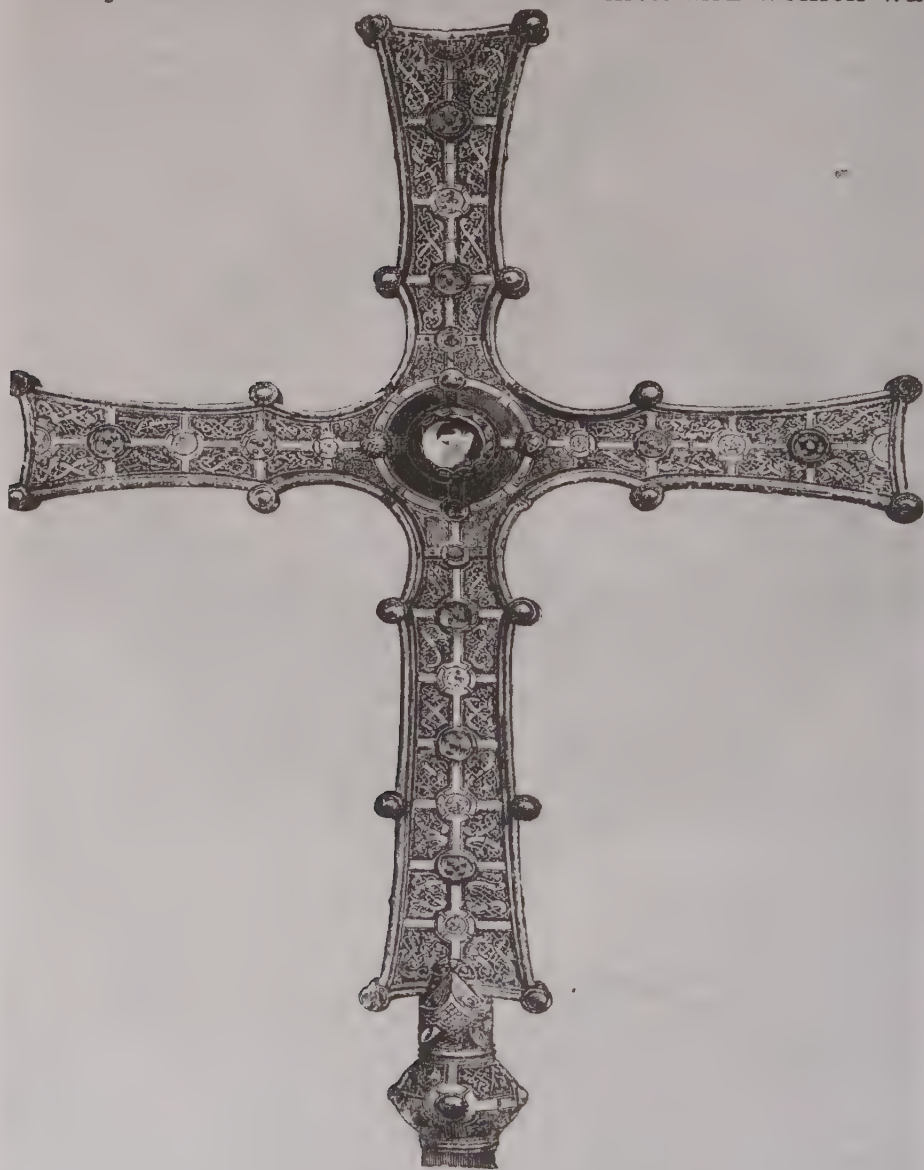


FIG. 143.—The Cross of Cong: front view. (From Miss Stokes's *Early Christian Art in Ireland*.)

fastened at the throat by a large ornamental brooch. Many

\* See Miss Stokes on the Tara Brooch and Ardagh Chalice, *Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad., Sec. Ser.*, vol. II., p. 451, and her *Early Christian Art*, pp. 69–88.



of these old brooches are preserved, but the one now under notice is by far the most perfect and beautiful of all. No drawing can give any adequate idea of the extraordinary delicacy and beauty of the work on this brooch, which is perhaps the finest specimen of ancient metal-work remaining in any country.

The Cross of Cong, which is 2 feet 6 inches high, was a processional cross, made to enshrine a piece of the true cross. It is all covered over with elaborate ornamentation of pure Celtic design, and a series of inscriptions in the Irish language along the sides gives its full history. It was made by order of Turlogh O'Connor king of Connaught, for the church of Tuam, then governed by Archbishop Muredach O'Duffy. The accomplished artist, who finished his work in 1123, and who deserves to be remembered to all time, was Mailisa Mac Braddan O'Hechan.

Some of the finest of the metal work is exhibited on the shrines, of which many specimens are preserved in the National Museum in Dublin. Of these, two have already been mentioned, those of St. Maidoc and St. Patrick's bell. An engraving of this last splendid specimen of ancient Irish metal-work forms the Frontispiece of our Second Volume. Another very remarkable one, probably made in the beginning of the twelfth century, is the shrine of St. Manchan of Lemanaghan in King's County, now and from time immemorial kept in the Roman Catholic Church of Boher, in the parish of Lemanaghan. It is profusely decorated with the usual Irish ornamentation; and there were originally fifty-two bronze figures of laymen and ecclesiastics formed in high relief, fastened on the two sloping sides, of which only ten remain. Five of these figures are pictured elsewhere in this book (vol. II., p. 204). A restored model, heavily gilt, as the shrine itself originally was, with the whole fifty-two figures, may be seen in the National Museum.\*

\* This shrine is fully described and illustrated by the Rev. James Graves in the *Kilk. Arch. Journ.* for 1874-5, p. 134.

In 1896 Mr. Edmond Johnson, of Dublin, a practical goldsmith and jeweller, made a detailed examination of some Irish gold ornaments belonging to remote pre-Christian times; and wrote a most useful and interesting memorandum on the modes of working in use among the ancient Irish goldsmiths.\* He believes that the fuel used must have been birch charcoal, which gave the highest temperature within reach of those old cairds. With the appliances then available, neither coal nor anthracite gave sufficient heat to melt gold: and he says that he remembered birch charcoal used for this purpose in his father's workshop. A furnace of about one cubic foot internal measurement would—as he states—be sufficient: it was filled with the charcoal, having the crucible buried in the centre of the glowing mass: and even with this, some flux, such as nitre or borax, would be required to melt the gold. It would, he says, be necessary to have a small orifice at the base for a bellows of considerable power; which agrees with our own inference (in volume II., pages 305–308), about an ordinary forge-fire, that the orifice for the bellows-pipe was in the centre of the bottom, or in the bottom of one of the side-flags. Mr. Johnson shows that such tube-shaped articles as the fibula or *Bunne-do-at*†—all of pagan times—were made of several pieces, each of which was first cast roughly and then hammered on shaped anvil-surfaces into the required form. After the pieces had been made to accurately fit each other, they were “sweated,” or welded together by surface-melting—never soldered. Mr. Johnson's observation about the practice of shaping gold by hammering is corroborated by the old records. In the Book of the Dun Cow the *gipne* or frontlet worn by the charioteer Loeg is compared, for its colour, to gold hammered over the edge of an anvil.‡

\* Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad., 1893–1896, p. 780.

† See vol. II., p. 241.

‡ Kilk. Arch. Journ., 1870–71, p. 424.

The ornamentation, which consists—as already observed—of lines, circles, spirals, lozenges, &c., was not done by engraving with a sharp tool, but by hammer and chisel. Some concentric rings on the buttons or cups at the two ends of the fibulæ are so true that they must—he says—have been turned on a lathe: which also agrees with the statements as to the knowledge and use of the lathe in chap. xxiv., sect. 5, *infra*.

Mr. Johnson states that the tools and appliances necessary to produce these gold ornaments were:—furnace, charcoal, crucible, mould for the roughly-cast ingot, flux, bellows, several hammers, anvils, swage-anvil (*i.e.* an anvil shaped for moulding by hammering), chisels



FIG. 144.



FIG. 145.



FIG. 146.

Sometimes ornaments were engraved on bone, of which these are three examples.  
(From Wilde's Catalogue, p. 346.)

for impressing ornament, sectional tool for producing concentric rings, [also a lathe]: all these, it is to be remembered, in remote pagan times. Certain beautiful ornaments on one of the specimens quite puzzled Mr. Johnson as to how they were produced with the tools then at the disposal of workmen: none of his workmen—some of the best goldworkers anywhere to be found—could produce them with the tools in question.\*

#### 4. Stone Carving.

A stone-carver was called *tollaid* [tullee], from *toll*, 'a hole': *tollaim*, 'I bore, pierce, perforate.' Stone-carvers are mentioned in the eighth-century Milan Irish glosses: *onaib*

\* For more about metal-workers, see chap. xxiv.

*tollaidib bite oc cumtach són* : ' by the stone-cutters engaged in building.\* Artistic stone-carving is chiefly exhibited in the great stone crosses, of which about fifty-five still remain in various parts of Ireland. One peculiarity of the Irish Celtic-cross is a circular ring round the intersection, binding the arms together. This peculiar shape was developed in Ireland ; and once formed, it remained fixed from the eighth or ninth century to the twelfth. Thirty-two of the fifty-five existing crosses are richly ornamented ; and eight have inscriptions with names of persons who have been identified as living at various times from A.D. 904 to 1150. Miss Stokes gives the dates of the high stone crosses as extending over a period from the tenth to the thirteenth century inclusive. Besides the ornamentation, most of the high crosses contain groups of figures representing various subjects of sacred history, such as the Crucifixion, the fall of man, Noah in the ark, the sacrifice of Isaac, the fight of David and Goliath, the arrest of our Lord, the crucifixion of St. Peter head downward, Eve presenting the apple to Adam, the journey to Egypt, &c.

These sculptures were " iconographic," that is to say, they were intended to bring home to the minds of the unlettered people the truths of religion and the facts of Scripture history by vivid illustration : something like the representations of the " Stations of the Cross " in Roman Catholic churches of the present day. No doubt the preachers, in their discourses, directed attention to these representations : and perhaps they often lectured standing at the foot of the cross with the people ranged in front, the preacher pointing to the several sculptured groups as he went on, and as occasion required. It is probable that the groups were painted in colours so as to bring them out more distinctly.

This practice of teaching by pictorial or sculptured representation was common in all Christian countries, and

\* Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus*, I. 449.





FIG. 147.

High Cross of Monasterboice; 27 feet high; formed of three pieces—the shaft, the cross with circle, and the top. (From Miss Stokes's *Early Christian Art in Ireland*.) Of another of the three Monasterboice crosses—"Muredach's Cross" (15 feet high)—a reproduction in exact facsimile stands in the large central hall of the National Museum, Dublin.

prevails everywhere at the present day. "The churches," writes Miss Stokes,\* "were to be the books of the unlearned, as St. John Damascene has said of sculptured images:—'The learned have them as a kind of book which is for the use of the unlearned and ignorant.'"

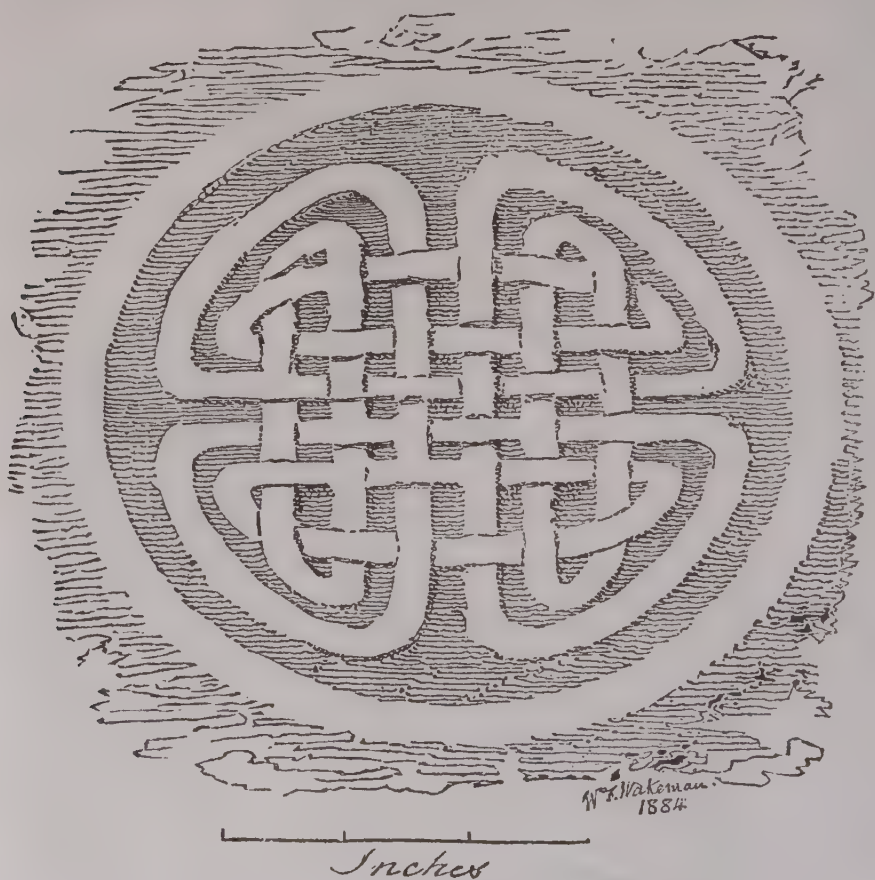


FIG. 148.

Boss of a High Cross in Tynan, near Armagh: showing the interlaced ornamentation as used on stone.  
(From *Kilk. Archaeol. Journ.* for 1883-4, p. 425. See also fig. 27, p. 71, *supra*.)

As for the ornamentation on the high crosses, it is still of the same general Celtic character that we find in metal-work and in illuminated manuscripts; and it exhibits the

\* In her Paper on Christian Iconography in Ireland, which the reader may consult for further information on this point (see List of Authorities, *infra*).

same masterly skill and ease both in design and execution. A few high crosses of the Irish shape are found in the south of Scotland, and in the north of England ; but they are obviously imitations of those of Ireland, made by Irish artists or under the influence of Irishmen.

The progress made by the ancient Irish in sculpture may be best described in the substance of Petrie's words as recorded by Dr. William Stokes. Many evidences, Petrie observes, may be found of the Irish having possessed great proficiency in this art before the tenth century. This is shown chiefly in the carved tombstones and in the stone crosses. Statues, properly so called, were not introduced for some centuries later. Monumental effigies appear to have been brought in by the Anglo-Normans. And again : true it is that in the drawing of the human figure, as seen in the older MSS. and in sculptures, whether in stone or in metal, it is easy to perceive a deficient power of execution and design ; but even with such defects, the old Irish artists are often most successful in expression. The bas-reliefs of ecclesiastics and of holy women in their early costumes on the Shrine of St. Maidoc are of an execution marvellously delicate ; the expression of the countenances is in a high degree felicitous and varied ;\* and to come to later times, the crowned effigies of O'Brien and O'Conor, at Corcomroe and Roscommon Abbeys, exhibit a power of sculpture which may compare with anything of the same date in England. The same admirable quality of expression may be seen in the figure of the Saviour on the Cross of Tuam, and in many other examples.†

\* For example see two of these figures depicted in vol. II., p. 179, expressing sorrow after the Crucifixion.

† Stokes's *Life of Petrie*, pp. 269, 297. See also Petrie's Letter at p. 404 of the same book. On the subject of Irish crosses, see O'Neill's *Irish Crosses* : Mr. Brash's article on *Irish Sculptured Crosses*, in the *Kilk. Arch. Journ.*, 1872-3 ; and especially Miss Stokes's book on the *High Crosses of Castledermot and Durrow*, and her *Early Christian Art in Ireland*. From these two last books the greater part of the information given above about the High Crosses has been taken.

Churches and Round Towers have been noticed in chap. x. ; and Dwelling Houses and Fortresses will be treated of in chap. xx. For more about Workers in stone, see vol. II., p. 321.

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## CHAPTER XVII

### MUSIC

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#### SECTION I. *History.*



IRISH Musicians were celebrated for their skill from the very earliest ages. Our native literature—whether referring to pagan or Christian times—abounds in references to music and to skilful musicians, who are always spoken of in terms of the utmost respect. Everywhere through the Records we find evidences that the ancient Irish people, both high and low, were passionately fond of music : it entered into their daily life : formed part of their amusements, meetings, and celebrations of every kind. In the Visions—such as those of Adamnan—music is always one of the delights of heaven ; and one of the chief functions of the angels who attend on God is to chant music of ineffable sweetness for Him, which they do generally while in the shape of white birds. The legend mentioned at page 395, *supra*, of a person being entranced for centuries with the singing of a bird, while imagining the time was only a few hours, is indicative of intense appreciation of music ; and an equally striking example is found in the Saltair na Rann, where the hard lot of Adam and Eve for a whole year after their expulsion



from Paradise is described, when they were "without proper food, fire, house, *music*, or raiment." Here music is put in among the necessities of life, so that it was a misery to be without it. In Christian times "music"—says Dr. Keller—"was cultivated by them [the Irish] as an art intimately connected with public worship";\* and another distinguished German scholar, Dr. Wattenbach, has been quoted (p. 560, *supra*) as also bearing testimony to their musical skill.

In the early ages of the church many of the Irish ecclesiastics took great delight in playing on the harp; and in order to indulge this innocent and refining taste, they were wont to bring with them in their missionary wanderings a small portable harp. This fact is mentioned not only in the Lives of some of the Irish saints, but also by Giraldus Cambrensis.† Figures of persons playing on harps are—as we shall see—common on Irish stone crosses, and also on the shrines of ancient reliquaries. It appears from several authorities that the practice of playing on the harp *as an accompaniment to the voice* was common in Ireland as early as the fifth or sixth century.

During the long period when learning flourished in Ireland, Irish professors and teachers of music would seem to have been as much in request in foreign countries as those of literature and philosophy. In the middle of the seventh century, Gertrude, daughter of Pepin, mayor of the palace, abbess of Nivelles in Belgium, engaged SS. Foillan and Ultan, brothers of the Irish saint Fursa of Peronne, to instruct her nuns in psalmody.‡ In the latter half of the ninth century the cloister schools of St. Gall were conducted by an Irishman, Maengal or Marcellus, a man deeply versed in sacred and secular literature, including music. Under his teaching the music school there attained its highest fame; and among his

\* Ulst. Journ. of Archæol., VIII. 218.

† Top. Hib., III. xii.

‡ Boll. Acta SS., 17 Mar., p. 595 : Lanigan, II. 464.

disciples was Notker Balbulus, one of the most celebrated musicians of the middle ages.\*

That the cultivation of music was not materially interrupted by the Danish troubles appears from several authorities. Warton, in his "History of English Poetry."† says :—"There is sufficient evidence to prove that the Welsh bards were early connected with the Irish. Even so late as the eleventh century the practice continued among the Welsh bards of receiving instruction in the bardic profession [of poetry and music] from Ireland." The Welsh records relate that Gryffith ap Conan, king of Wales, whose mother was an Irishwoman, and who was himself born in Ireland, brought over to Wales—about the year 1078—a number of skilled Irish musicians, who, in conference with the native bards, reformed the instrumental music of the Welsh.‡

But the strongest evidence of all—evidence quite conclusive as regards the particular period—is that of Giraldus Cambrensis, who seldom had a good word for anything Irish. He heard the Irish harpers in 1185, and gives his experience as follows :—"They are incomparably more skilful than any other nation I have ever seen. For their manner of playing on these instruments, unlike that of the Britons [or Welsh] to which I am accustomed, is not slow and harsh, but lively and rapid, while the melody is both sweet and sprightly. It is astonishing that in so complex and rapid a movement of the fingers the musical proportions [as to time] can be preserved ; and that throughout the difficult modulations on their various instruments, the harmony is completed with such a sweet rapidity. They enter into a movement and conclude it in so delicate a manner, and tinkle the little strings so sportively under the deeper tones of the bass strings—they delight so delicately and soothe with such gentleness,

\* Schubiger, *Die Sängerschule St. Gallens*, p. 33 : Lanigan, III. 285.

† Vol. I., Diss. I.

‡ Harris's *Ware*, Antiqq., 184.

“ that the perfection of their art appears in the concealment of art.”\*

For centuries after the time of Giraldus music continued to be cultivated uninterruptedly, and there was an unbroken succession of great professional harpers. That they maintained their ancient pre-eminence down to the seventeenth century there is abundant evidence, both native and foreign, to prove. Among those who were massacred with Sir John Bermingham, in 1328, was the blind harper Mulrony Mac Carroll, “ chief minstrel of Ireland and Scotland,” “ of whom it’s reported that no man in any age ever heard, or shall hereafter hear, a better timpanist [harper].”† The Scotch writer, John Major, early in the sixteenth century, speaks of the Irish as most eminent in the musical art. Richard Stanihurst (1584) mentions in terms of rapturous praise an Irish harper of his day named Cruise; and Drayton (1613) has the following stanza in his “ Polyolbion ” :—

“ The Irish I admire  
And still cleave to that lyre,  
As our Muse’s mother;  
And think till I expire,  
Apollo’s such another.”

The great harpers of those times are, however, mostly lost to history. It is only when we arrive at the seventeenth century that we begin to be able to identify certain composers as the authors of existing airs. The oldest harper of great eminence coming within this description is Rory Dall (blind) O’Cahan, who, although a musician from choice and taste, was really one of the chiefs of the Antrim family of O’Cahan. He was the composer of many fine airs, some of which we still possess. He visited Scotland with a retinue of gentlemen about the year 1600, where he died after a short residence, and many of his airs

\* Top. Hib. III. xi.

† FM, A.D. 1328, note *w*.

are still favourites among the Scotch people, who claim them—and sometimes even the author himself—as their own.

Thomas O'Connallon was born in the county Sligo early in the seventeenth century. He seems to have been incomparably the greatest harper of his day, and composed many exquisite airs. We have still extant a short and very beautiful Irish ode in praise of his musical performances, written by some unknown contemporary bard, which has been several times translated.\* After his death, which happened in or about 1700, his brother Laurence travelled into Scotland, where he introduced several of the great harper's compositions.

A much better known personage was Turlogh O'Carolan or Carolan : born in Nobber, county Meath, about 1670 : died in 1738. He became blind in his youth from an attack of smallpox, after which he began to learn the harp ; and ultimately he became the greatest Irish musical composer of modern times. Like the bards of old, he was a poet as well as a musician. Many of his Irish songs are published in " Hardiman's Irish Minstrelsy " and elsewhere. A large part of his musical compositions are preserved, and may be found in various published collections of Irish airs. Carolan belonged to a respectable family, and, like Rory Dall, became a professional musician from taste rather than from necessity. He always travelled about with a pair of horses, one for himself and the other for his servant who carried his harp ; and he was received and welcomed everywhere by the gentry, Protestant as well as Catholic.

## 2. *Musical Instruments.*

The **Harp** is mentioned in the earliest Irish literature ; it is constantly mixed up with our oldest legends and historical romances ; and it was in use from the remotest

\* A beautiful translation, but too free, by the Rev. James Wills, may be seen in the *Dub. Pen. Journ.*, i. 112 : and a much closer one by Sir Samuel Ferguson in his *Lays of the Western Gael*.



pagan times. It was called *crott* or *cruit*, which always glosses *cithara* in Zeuss. A later term for a harp is *cláirsech*, which is now the name in general use. Several harps are sculptured on the high crosses, some of which are depicted here and at p. 582, farther on, from which we can form a good idea of their shape and size in old times. From all these, and from several incidental expressions found in the literature, we can see that the harps of the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries were of medium size or rather small, the average height being about 30 inches : and some were not much more than half this height. Probably those of the early centuries were of much the



FIG. 149.



FIG. 150.



FIG. 151.

Figures 149 and 150, Harp-players sculptured on the Monasterboice High Crosses. (From Wood-Martin's Pagan Ireland.) Figure 151, Harper on west face of High Cross of Castledermot, of about the end of tenth century. (From Miss Stokes's High Crosses of Castledermot and Durrow.)

same size—from 16 to 36 inches. Very small harps were often used for singing with. In the story of Felim Mac Criffan, king of Munster in the ninth century, already noticed (p. 445), we read of a poet singing to a little instrument of eight strings : and from the manner in which it is mentioned, it was evidently a type in common use. The specimens of harps belonging to later ages—including "Brian Boru's harp" noticed below—are all small—still about thirty inches. But in more recent times it was the fashion to make them larger.

The ordinary harp of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—as we know by many specimens remaining—

had generally thirty strings, comprehending a little more than four octaves: but sometimes it had double that number.\* Several harps of the old pattern are still preserved in museums in Dublin and elsewhere, the most interesting of which is the one now popularly known as Brian Boru's harp in Trinity College, Dublin. This is the oldest harp in Ireland—probably the oldest in existence. Yet it did not belong to Brian Boru; for Dr. Petrie's investigation† has rendered it highly probable that it was not made before the end of the fourteenth century. It is thirty-two inches high; it had thirty strings; and the ornamentation and general workmanship are exquisitely beautiful. No specimen of the Irish harp used in the middle ages has been preserved. Irish harpers always played with the fingers or fingernails. The harp was the instrument of the higher classes, among whom harp-playing was a very usual accomplishment. Speaking of recent times, Crofton Croker and Hardiman‡ tell us that in the eighteenth century almost every one [of the higher classes] played on the Irish harp. In very early ages a professional harper was honoured beyond all other musicians: in social

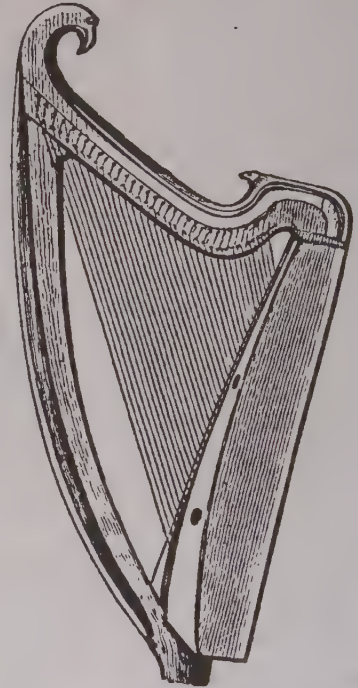


FIG. 152.

Irish Harp, now in National Museum (different in shape from Brian Boru's). Not more than 250 or 300 years old. Five feet high: had thirty-six wire strings, fastened with iron pins in a brass plate. (From Wilde's Catalogue, p. 246.)

\* See Ferguson's article "Of the Antiquity of the Harp and Bagpipe in Ireland," in Bunting's *Ancient Irish Music* (1840), p. 37.

† In his memoir of this harp, in Bunting's *Anc. Mus. of Irel.*, 1840, p. 42. O'Curry (*Man. & Cust.*, II., Lects. xxxii. and xxxiii.) believes it to be older; but he does not refer it to the time of Brian Boru.

‡ *Irish Minstrelsy*, I. 183.

position he ranked—according to the Brehon Law—with a chief of the *bo-airc* class (p. 157, *supra*). A harper moreover was the only musician that was entitled to honour-price on account of his music.\*

The Irish had a small stringed instrument called a **Timpan**, which had only a few strings—from three to eight. It was played with a bow, or with both a bow and plectrum, or with the finger-nail; and the strings were probably stopped with the fingers of the left hand, like those of a violin or guitar. That the bow was used in playing it appears evident from a short quotation from the Brehon Laws given by O'Curry,† in which it is stated that the timpanist used "a [bended] wand furnished with hair": and he gives another quotation (p. 364) that plainly points to the use of the finger-nail. This little instrument was evidently a great favourite, for we constantly meet with such expressions as the "sweet-stringed timpan." Giraldus mentions the harp and the timpan by the names "cithara" and "tympanum": but the timpan is noticed in two native authorities much older: Cormac's Glossary and Saltair na Rann. From the explanation of the name given by Cormac (p. 163), we see that the frame—like that of the harp—was made of willow, and that it had brass strings.

The instrument usually denoted—outside Ireland—by the Latin *tympanum*, or in its shortened form *týmpan*, we know was a drum of some sort: and to Irish antiquarians it has been a puzzle how the word came to be applied in Ireland to a stringed instrument. Probably the Irish timpan was really a small flat tympanum or drum, with a short neck added, furnished with three or more strings, stretched across the flat face and along the neck, and tuned and regulated by pins or keys and a bridge—something like the modern guitar or banjo, but with the neck much shorter. The drum—with a few small openings in the side—gave resonance; and probably

\* Br. Laws, v. 107, bot.

† Man. & Cust., II. 363.

during the playing, the body, or the stretched membrane of the drum, was struck now and then with the hand, as players now occasionally strike the body of the guitar so that to some extent it still preserved the character of a drum. There can be hardly a doubt that Giraldus's "tympanum" was the Irish timpan; and he would scarcely have given it that name unless it was really a drumshaped instrument—a drum furnished with neck and strings.

There was a small harp called a *ceis* [kesh], which was used to accompany the ordinary harp, and which will be again mentioned farther on (p. 587). On one panel of the north high cross of Castledermot is a figure seated playing on a small harp, which is represented as about sixteen inches high: it is square-shaped: the top corner farthest from the player is sharp: the other three corners are much rounded—so that the bottom of the little instrument forms almost a semicircle. Possibly this may be intended to represent a *ceis*: but then there is no player with a larger instrument near this harper: as we might expect in case of a *ceis*.

The harp—as well as the timpan—was furnished with brass strings, as is seen by the explanation of "ceis," as meaning, in one of its applications, 'a small pin which fastens the brazen string of the harp.'\* The tuning-key was made with a wooden handle tipped with steel, like the modern piano-key. It was called *crann-glésa* ('tuning-wood'); and it was considered so important—inasmuch as the harp was silent without it—that provision was made in the Brehon Law—with penalties—for its prompt return in case the owner lent it.† Both harp and timpan, when not in use, were kept in a case, commonly of otter skins, called a *coimét* ('case' or 'keeper'), and *crott-bolg* ('harp-bag').‡ A harper was called *cruitire* (crutter): the word *senmaire*

\* Rev. Celt., xx. 165.

† O'Curry, Man. & Cust., II. 256.

‡ Tain bo Fraich, p. 141: Silva Gad., 217, mid.



[shennimärë] was sometimes applied to a musician in general, from *senm*, 'sound' (Trip. Life, 142, 12).

The **bagpipes** were known in Ireland from the earliest times: the form used was something like that now commonly known as the Highland pipes—slung from the shoulder, the bag inflated by the mouth. The other form—resting on the lap, the bag inflated by a bellows—which is much the finer instrument, is of modern invention.

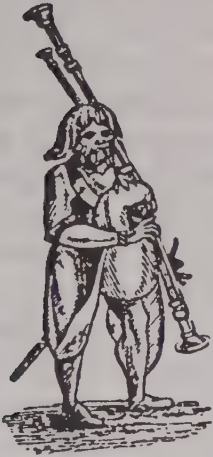


FIG. 153.

Irish Piper playing at the head of a band marching to battle. (From Derrick's Image of Ireland, 1578.)

The bagpipes were in very general use, especially among the lower classes. The ancient name of the whole instrument or set was *tinne* [2-syll.]: and so Dr. Stokes renders this word in the passage of the Bruden Da Derga where King Conari's nine pipers are described.\* The pipers themselves are called in the same passage, *cuslemmach*, from *cusle* (now *cuisle*), 'a pipe'—one of the pipes of the *tinne*. As there were nine players here, we can see that the custom then probably was, as it is now in Scotland, to have a body of pipers playing together. That the pipes or *tinne* of those days were much the same as the Scotch or Highland pipes of our

time, may be inferred from the descriptive epithet *cetharchóire* (kehercora) applied to the set of pipes in the above-mentioned passage. This term means 'four-tuned' (from *cethir*, 'four,' and *cóir*, 'tuning'), and—as Dr. Stokes remarks—"seems to refer to the tuning of the chanter, "of the two shorter reed-drones, and of the longest drone, "four in all."

The simple pipe—as we might expect—was much in use, blown by the mouth at the end: the note being produced either by a whistle as in the modern flageolet, or by a reed

\* Rev. Celt., xxii. 183, 184.

as in the clarionet. It was called *bunne* or *buinne* [2-syll.], which means a 'pipe' or 'tube' of any kind.\* An ancient Irish glossator, annotating the words of a Latin commentary on the Psalms of David, explains the words *tuba corneta* ('horn-shaped tube') of the text by an Irish phrase, which is in English:—[tuba-corneta] "a *buinne* which was in the shape of a horn" (Zeuss; 499, 41). The single pipe was also called *cuisle* or *cuislenn*.

We obtain a good idea of the shape and size of those pipes from several representations on the high crosses. Some are quite straight; others very slightly curved upwards, *i.e.* having the convex side downwards while being played. All get gradually larger from the mouthpiece to the end: and they are represented of various lengths from about 14 inches up to 24. On the south-east cross of Monasterboice, three men are shown playing on these pipes. On one of the Clonmacnoise crosses a man is playing a triple pipe, *i.e.* having three tubes in close contact, apparently with a single mouthpiece: the lengths represented as about 24, 20, and 16 inches, respectively.† It is to be presumed that there was a double-tubed instrument as well as single and triple. One of the men shown in fig. 155 plays on a compound pipe, which seems double. These pipes noticed here as figured on the crosses, though trumpet-shaped, were not trumpets: and, doubtless, they were made of wood. We often meet expressions in the tales showing that the music of this simple pipe—whether single, double, or triple—was in great favour, and was considered very sweet:—*Bindithir re ceolaib cuislindi bindfoghar a gotha ocus a Gaedeilgi na hingine*: 'sweet as pipe-tunes was the melodious sound of the maiden's voice and her Gaelic.'‡

\* In the Glosses, the Latin *tibia* (a pipe or flute) is commonly explained by *buinne* (Z., 13, 28; 67, 29): see the word in another sense discussed in vol. II. pp. 241. to 243.

† O'Neill's Crosses, Pl. 24.

‡ Stokes's *Acallamh*, p. 316.

A player on the *buinne* was called a *buinnire* [3-syll.]. In the arrangements for seating the guests at the banquets of Tara,\* the *buinnire* and the *cornaire*, or horn-blower, were placed at the same table. There was a sort of



FIG. 151

musical pipe called a *cuiscech* or *cuisig*, differing in some way from the *buinne*†: and another called a *fedán* or whistle, the player on which was a *fedánach*‡.



FIG. 155.



FIG. 156.

Harp- and Pipe-players. Figures 154 and 155 sculptured on the High Crosses of Monasterboice. (From Wood-Martin's *Pagan Ireland*.) Figure 156 on Durrow High Cross. (From Miss Stokes's *High Crosses of Castledermot and Durrow*.) All ninth, tenth, or eleventh century.

In several of the eighth-century quotations of Zeuss a pipe-player is called *erochair-chetlaid* [erohar-kailee], which always glosses *tibicen*, a 'pipe-player': from *erochair*, i.e. *crus*, 'a [hollow] plant-stem'; and *cetlaid*, which glosses

\* Petrie's *Tara*, p. 206: where *bunniri* is mistranslated 'footmen': but that was more than sixty years ago, when the eminent men who dealt with those difficult old texts had few or none of the aids available to scholars of the present day. On the *buinne*, see also O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, II. 306.

† O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, II. 310, 313, 325.

‡ *Ibid.*, 328, 368, 376: also Br. Laws, v. 108, 109.

*cantar*, 'a musician or player.' These archaic explanations indicate that the primitive pipe was the hollow stem of some plant, such as the elder or boortree, from which boys sometimes make musical pipes at the present day.

The Irish had curved bronze trumpets and horns, of various shapes and sizes, which, judging from the great numbers found buried in clay and bogs, must have been in very general use. They are indeed found in far greater numbers in Ireland than in any other country. In 1750 thirteen were found in a place between Cork and Mallow ; in 1787 three were turned up in Limerick ; four in 1794 in a bog on the edge of Loughnashade, beside the old palace of Emain ; among the great workshop find at Dooros-Heath (see this in Index) were thirteen trumpets ; several were found in a bog near Killarney in 1835 ; four in a bog in Antrim in 1840 ; three in Cavan in 1847. The fact that they are so often found in numbers together would indicate their military use. The Irish probably derived their fondness for trumpets from their ancestors the Gauls, who, we know from the best authorities, used them in great numbers in battle.

In the National Museum in Dublin there is a collection of twenty-six trumpets, varying in length from about 18 inches up to 8 feet ; besides portions of others more or less imperfect. Fig. 157 will give a good idea of their shapes. Some have the blowing aperture in the side, while others were blown from the end. It is not known how the side aperture was used : no trumpeter of the present day could produce a musical note by blowing through it. The smaller ones were cast in one piece, an operation which, considering the thinness of the casting, the tubular shape, and the extent of surface, required much skill and delicate adjustment of moulds. The very long ones were not cast, but formed of thin hammered bronze. The two shown at the bottom of the figure are like each other in construction. The smaller one is six feet long : it



has a circular ornamented plate at the large end, which is shown separately in fig. 159. The large one at the bottom, which, so far as we know, is the finest specimen ever found in any country, measures  $8\frac{1}{2}$  feet in length, and had probably an ornamented plate, as in fig. 159. The mouth-pieces of both have been lost. Each consists of two parts, made separately, and carefully jointed, as seen in the figure. The bronze was hammered thin and bended into shape till the two edges were in close contact all along the concave side. The edges were then joined, not by soldering, but by means of thin narrow bronze straps

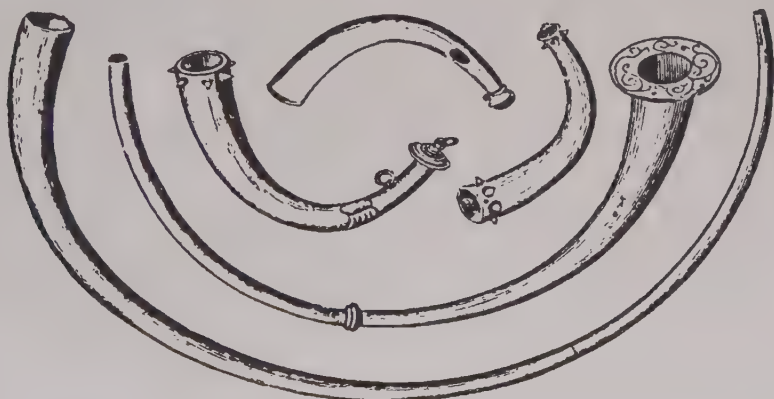


FIG 157.

Group of Irish Trumpets, now in National Museum, Dublin: described in text.  
(From Wilde's Catalogue, p. 627.)

extending along the whole length, and riveted at both sides of the joining. It is difficult to understand how the riveting was done in such a long and slender tube. The rivets are very small and placed close together—six or seven to the inch—fixed with absolute uniformity, exhibiting the most perfect and beautiful example of riveting ever found in Ireland. The three smaller trumpets shown in the figure were made by casting.

A few of those in the Museum are plain, but most are ornamented. One prevailing ornament is a circle of projecting conical buttons or studs, similar to those seen on

the caldrons and on the gold gorgets: they appear on two of the small trumpets in the figure. There is nothing rude in the construction of these trumpets. On the contrary, they all exhibit great taste in design, and consummate skill in workmanship, a circumstance that must excite our wonder when we recollect their great antiquity; for according to the opinion of those who have studied such remains, not only in Ireland but all over Europe, some of them at least belong to a period long prior to the Christian era.

The most common name for a trumpet is *stoc*; but there were several other names:—*corn*, *buabaill*, *adharc*, *dudag*, *gall-trompa*, and *barra-buadh* [borra-boo]. These no doubt denoted trumpets or horns of different kinds. O'Curry believes that the *corn* (i.e. 'horn') was the long trumpet blown from the end, the *stoc* being the shorter one. A trumpeter was usually called *stocaire* [stuckera]; a horn-blower, *cornaire* [curnera]; and both are constantly mentioned in old Irish literature.\*

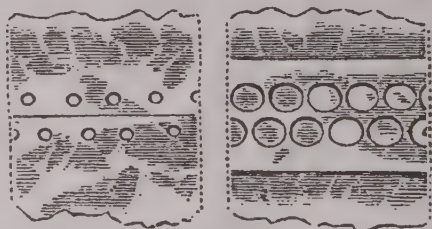


FIG. 158.

Riveting on Trumpets.

Among the household of every king and chief there was a band of trumpeters, who were assigned their proper places at feasts and meetings. Trumpets were used for various purposes:—in war (p. 147, *supra*); in hunting; for signals during meetings and banquets; as a mark of honour on the arrival of distinguished visitors; and such like. For war purposes, trumpeters—as already noticed—had different calls for directing movements (p. 148, *supra*). Trumpeters and horn-blowers sometimes imitated the

\* See Petrie's article on Trumpets in *Dub. Pen. Journ.*, II. 27; Wilde on Trumpets in his *Catalogue* (p. 623); and O'Curry, *Man. & Cust.*, II. 307. In all these articles references are given to other authorities.

voices and cries of animals. In Cormac's Glossary (p. 91), under the word "Gráice" [Graukč], we read that this word means 'raven-conversation,' *i.e.* the croaking, or language, of ravens; and immediately afterwards it is stated that trumpeters produced imitations of these sounds on horns. (See also Man. & Cust., II. 368.)

The ancient Irish were very fond of a *craebh-ciuil* [crave-cule], or 'musical branch,' a little branch on which were suspended a number of diminutive bells, which produced a sweet tinkling when shaken: a custom found



FIG. 159.

Ornamental bronze plate at end of Trumpet.  
(From Wilde's Catalogue, p. 631.)

also in early times on the Continent. The musical branch figures much in Irish romantic literature. A performer called *cnám-fer* or 'bone-man' is mentioned in the "Fair of Carman" among the musicians. The term probably refers to sounding-bones or castanets. In the same poem (which is in the Book of Leinster) is named a *fidil* or

fiddle: but we cannot tell what was its shape or how it was played.\*

### 3. Characteristics ; Classes ; Styles.

In early Irish literature, whether in the native language or in Latin, music and poetry are often confounded, so that one sometimes finds it impossible to determine to which of the two the passages under notice refer. The

\* O'Curry, Man. & Cust., II. 305, gives the names of twenty musical instruments mentioned in Irish records, and discusses them all at length in Lectures xxx.-xxxviii.

confusion no doubt arose from the circumstance that the same man was formerly often both poet and musician. Music is indeed often specially mentioned, but always very vaguely ; and the airs that tradition has handed down are almost the only means we have of forming an opinion of the state of musical education in those old times. It is to be observed that writers of our own day, when treating of Irish music, are quite as much in the habit of confounding poetry and music as were those of a thousand years ago, and with less excuse.

There was not in Ireland, any more than elsewhere, anything like the modern developments of music. There were no such sustained and elaborate compositions as operas, oratorios, or sonatas. The music of ancient Ireland consisted wholly of **short airs**, each with two strains or parts—seldom more. But these, though simple in comparison with modern music, were constructed with such exquisite art that of a large proportion of them it may be truly said no modern composer can produce airs of a similar kind to equal them.

The ancient Irish must have used **harmony**, as appears from Giraldus's mention—in the passage quoted at p. 573—of the little strings tinkling under the deeper tones of the bass strings : and this is borne out by several words and expressions in native Irish writings. There are at least seven native words for concerted singing or playing, indicating how general was the custom :—*cómseinm*, *cóicetul*, *aibhse*, *cepóc* or *cepóg*, *claiss*, *clais-cetul*, and *foacanáid*.

*Cómseinm* is from *cóm*, 'together,' and *seinm*, 'playing ;' 'playing together.' This word occurs in an instructive illustrative note by the commentator on the *Amra*, explaining *ceis* (kesh), in one of its applications, as "a small *cruit* or harp that accompanies a large *cruit* in *comseinm* or concerted playing" ;\* showing a harmonic

\* Stokes in Rev. Celt., xx. 165.



combination of instrumental music. As *cómseinm* was applied to the music of instruments, *coicetul* refers to the voice, meaning, as it is explained in Cormac's Glossary (p. 43), 'singing together,' from *cetul*, 'singing.' When the poets had been freed at Drumketta by the intercession of St. Columba (p. 456, *supra*), the Preface to the Amra tells us that "they made a mighty music [by all singing together] for Columba [to honour him]: and *aidbse* [ive-shě] is the name of that music." And in another part of the Preface it is said that "they used to make that music [*i.e.* *aidbse*] singing simultaneously" [*in-oenfhecht*].\* In one of the old glosses of the Amra, it is stated that among the people of Alban or Scotland the *aidbse* or chorus-singing was called *cepóg* (keppoge). But this word was used in Ireland too: Ferloga, in the Tale of Mac Datho's Pig, says to Concobar:—"The young women and girls of Ulster shall sing a *cepóc* round me each evening": and Amergin the poet, lamenting the death of Aithirne (p. 453, *supra*), says:—"I will make a *cepóc* here, and I will make his lamentation."† It appears from all these references that the *aidbse* or *cepóc* was a funeral song. *Claiiss* (closh), Lat. *classis*, means a 'choir,' a number of persons singing together.‡ In one of the Zeuss Glosses persons are mentioned as singing the Psalms *for clais*,§ *i.e.* 'in choir': and from this again comes *clais-cetul*, 'choir-singing.'|| The Latin *succino* (*i.e.* *sub-cano*, 'I sing under,' or in subordination to another—I accompany) is glossed in Zeuss (429, 16; 880, 27), by the Irish *foacanim*, which has precisely the same meaning, from *foa*, 'under'; and *canim*, 'I sing.' The existence of this native word *foacanim* indicates very clearly that it was usual for one person to accompany another. Moreover, 'singing under' (*fo*), or subordi-

\* Rev. Celt., xx. 43. See also O'Curry, Man. & Cust., II. 246.

† O'Curry, Man. & Cust., II. 371, 373, 374: Ir. Texte, I. 106, 15, 16: Hib. Minora, 64, 13.

‡ Windisch in Ir. Texte, I. 425, "Claiiss."

§ Corm. Gloss., 35, "Clais."

|| Stokes, Lives of SS., line 3749.

nate to, another, could not mean singing in unison or in octave, but what we now mean by the expression "singing a second," *i.e.* in simple harmony.

*Ceól*, 'music,' and *binnius*, 'melody or sweetness,' are, in the old writings, distinguished from *cuibdius*, this last being a further development, to be understood no doubt as harmony. Thus in an ancient passage quoted by Prof. Kuno Meyer in "Hibernia Minora" (p. 27), it is said that "David added *binnius* and *cuibdius* to the Psalms," meaning apparently that he put melody to the words, and harmony to the melody. And farther on in the same passage :—"The Holy Spirit inspired in Asaph's mind the "*ceól* or music [*i.e.* the melody merely], and the sense that "are in the Psalm ; and David added *cuibdius* or harmony "to them." That *cuibdius* means 'harmony' appears also from O'Davorens' Glossary—which was compiled from ancient authorities—where he defines *rinn*, a certain kind or arrangement of music, as [*ceól*] *co cuibdius ina aghaidh*, [music] "with *cuibdius* against it."\* It is to be noticed, too, that in Cormac's Glossary (p. 163, 2) the word *symphonia* is used as applicable to the music of the timpan.

In some of the above examples the "singing or playing together" might mean merely in unison or in octaves ; but coupling all the Irish expressions with that of Cambrensis, we must conclude that the Irish harpers and singers used harmony, though no doubt it was of a very simple kind.

The Irish musicians had three **styles**, the effects of which the old Irish romance-writers describe with much exaggeration, as the Greeks describe the effects produced by the harp of Orpheus. Of all three we have numerous well-marked examples descending to the present day. The **Gen-traige** [gan-tree], which incited to merriment and laughter, is represented by the lively dance-tunes and other such spirited pieces. The **Gol-traige** [gol-tree] expressed sorrow : represented by the *keens* or death-

\* Three Irish Glossaries, 110 : O'Curry, Man. & Cust., II. 252.

tunes, many of which are still preserved. The **Suan-traige** [suan-tree] produced sleep. This style is seen in our lullabies or nurse-tunes, of which we have numerous beautiful specimens. Two of these styles—sorrow-music and mirth-music—are explained in Cormac's Glossary (pp. 89, 90). Probably the oldest example of the words of a lullaby that has come down to us is that composed by *Muirenn* for her son Finn when he was six years old : of which the Psalter of Cashel copy of the story, " The Boyish Exploits of Finn "—as old an authority as Cormac's Glossary—preserves the first line, and unfortunately only the first :—*Codail re suanán saime* : " Sleep [my child] with pleasant slumber\* " : which is the same as the beginning of some of our modern Irish nurse-songs.

Among the higher classes, both young and old were often lulled to sleep with music and song, so that the Suan-tree must have been in constant requisition. In the " Battle of Rossnaree " (p. 21), taken from the Book of Leinster, we are told that the guests in Dundalgan " were " put into their sleeping-rooms and lay on their couches : " and tunes and songs and eulogies were sung to them " [till they fell asleep]. The custom of lulling people—of all ages—to sleep by music or singing is very frequently noticed in the tales, though it was oftenest used with children : and it continued to our own time, as I have the best reason to remember.

The Irish had also what may be called **occupation-tunes**. The young girls accompanied their spinning with songs—both air and words made to suit the occupation. Special airs and songs were used during working-time by smiths, by weavers, and by boatmen : and we have still a " Smith's Song," the notes of which imitate the sound of the hammers on the anvil,† like Handel's " Harmonious Blacksmith."

\* Tromdamh, p. 293.

† See for this air (which was contributed by me) Petrie's *Anc. Mus. of Ireland*, p. 171.

At milking-time the girls were in the habit of chanting a particular sort of air, in a low gentle voice. These milking-songs were slow and plaintive, something like the nurse-tunes, and had the effect of soothing the cows and of making them submit more gently to be milked. This practice was common down to fifty or sixty years ago : and I remember seeing cows grow restless when the song was interrupted, and become again quiet and placid when it was resumed. The old practice also prevailed in Scotland, and probably has not yet quite died out there. Martin (p. 155) says that in his time—1703—when a cow was enraged by the loss of her calf, “ the last remedie us’d “ to pacifie her is to use the sweetest voice and sing all the “ time of milking her.” And referring to our own time, Carmichael, in his “ *Carmina Gadelica* ” (I. 258), says :— “ The cows become accustomed to these lilts and will not “ give their milk without them, nor, occasionally, without “ their favourite airs being sung to them ” : and so generally is this recognised that—as he tells us—girls with good voices get higher wages than those that cannot sing.

While ploughmen were at their work, they whistled a peculiarly wild, slow, and sad strain, which had as powerful an effect in soothing the horses at their hard work as the milking-songs had on the cows. Plough-whistles also were quite usual down to 1847 : and often when a mere boy, did I listen enraptured to the exquisite whistling of Phil Gleeson on a calm spring-day behind his plough. There were, besides, hymn-tunes : and young people used simple airs for all sorts of games and sports. In most cases, words suitable to the several occasions were sung with lullabies, laments, and occupation-tunes. Like the kindred Scotch, each tribe had a war-march which inspirited them when advancing to battle. Specimens of all these may be found in the collections of Bunting, Petrie, Joyce, and others. We have evidence that these occupation-tunes were in use at a very early time : for



in Cormac's Glossary (p. 69) it is stated that while the Fena were cooking their open-air dinner after their day's hunting, they chanted a kind of music called *esnad*.

The music of Ireland, like our ballad-poetry, has a considerable tendency to sadness. The greater number of the *kcens*, lullabies, and plough-whistles, and many of our ordinary tunes, are in the minor mode, which is essentially plaintive, even though it is often used in lively tunes : and the same plaintive character is impressed on many of the major airs by a minor seventh note. This tendency to sadness was the natural outcome of the miseries endured by the people during long centuries of disastrous wars and unrelenting penal laws. But it is a mistake to suppose that the prevailing character of Irish music is sad : by far the largest proportion of the airs are either light-hearted dance-tunes or song-airs full of energy and spirit, without a trace of sadness.

#### 4. *Modern Collections of ancient Irish Music.*

In early times they had no means of writing down music ; and musical compositions were preserved in the memory and handed down by tradition from generation to generation ; but in the absence of written record many were lost. While we have in our old books the Irish words of numerous early odes and lyrics, we know nothing of the music to which they were sung. It was only in the seventeenth or eighteenth century that people began to collect Irish airs from singers and players, and to write them down.\* Some attempts were made at home early in the eighteenth century : but later on more effectual measures were taken. Several meetings of harpers—the first in 1781—were held at Granard in the county Longford,

\* Mr. Chappell, the well-known writer on Musical History, author of *Popular [English] Music of the Olden Time*, once told me in conversation that in the British Museum there are copies of great numbers of Irish airs, much older than any collections we have in Ireland. So there is a field for some zealous investigator and collector of Irish music.

under the patronage and at the expense of James Dungan, a native of Granard, then living at Copenhagen. Each meeting was terminated by a ball, at which prizes were distributed to those who had been adjudged the best performers. Dungan himself was present at the last ball, when upwards of 1,000 guests, as we are told, assembled.

A few years later, a meeting to encourage the harp was organised in Belfast by a society of gentlemen under the leadership of Dr. James Mac Donnell. This meeting, which was held in Belfast in 1792, and which was attended by almost all the nobility and gentry of the neighbourhood, was followed by more practical results than those held at Granard. The harpers of the whole country had been invited to attend. But the confiscations, the penal laws, and the social disturbances of the preceding century and a half had done their work. The native gentry who loved music and patronised the harpers were scattered and ruined, and the race of harpers had almost died out. Only ten responded to the call, many of them very old and most of them blind, the decayed representatives of the great harpers of old. Edward Bunting, a local musician, was appointed to meet them ; and after they had all exhibited their skill in public, and prizes had been awarded to the most distinguished, he took down the best of the airs they played.

This was the origin of Bunting's well-known collection of Irish music. He published three volumes, the first in 1796, the second in 1809, and the third in 1840. Another collection, edited by George Petrie, was published by Holden of Dublin about the year 1840. A volume of Carolan's airs was published by his son in 1747 and republished by John Lee of Dublin in 1780 ; but many of Carolan's best airs are omitted from this collection ; and it poorly represents the great composer. A large number of Irish airs were printed in four volumes of a Dublin periodical called "The Citizen" in 1840 and 1841 : and these were followed up by a special volume

of airs by the editor. In 1844 was published "The Music of Ireland," by Frederick W. Horncastle, of the Chapel Royal, Dublin, a number of airs with accompaniments and English words; most of the airs had been already published, but some appeared then for the first time, among which is one very beautiful *suantree* called "The Fairies' Lullaby."

In 1855 a large volume of Irish music hitherto unpublished was edited, under the auspices of "The Society for the Preservation and Publication of the Melodies of Ireland," by Dr. George Petrie: and the first number (*i.e.* the fourth part) of a volume was printed, but never published. A volume of airs never before published was edited by me in 1873, collected by myself from singers and players in the course of many years. A second instalment of the Petrie collection was printed in 1877, edited by F. Hoffman. These are the principal original collections of Irish music extant; other collections are mostly copied from them. About 1870 Bussell of Dublin issued a large collection of Irish airs, edited by Dr. Francis Robinson, with a good Introduction on Irish Music by George Farquhar Graham: all the airs in this had been published before. Later on two volumes of the Dance Music of Ireland were edited by Mr. R. M. Levey of Dublin; some of which then appeared for the first time. Dr. Charles Villiers Stanford has quite recently (1902-3) edited the whole of Petrie's collection, about 1800 airs—the simple melodies without accompaniments—which include many of those of Petrie's already published with numerous others that had never previously seen the light. This work, as Dr. Stanford observes in his short Preface, forms "a vast treasure-house of folk-song."

The man who did most in modern times to draw attention to Irish music was Thomas Moore. He composed his exquisite songs to old Irish airs; and songs and airs were published in successive numbers or volumes,

beginning in 1807. They at once became popular, not only in the British Islands, but on the Continent and in America ; and Irish music was thenceforward studied and admired where it would have never been heard of but for Moore. The whole collection of songs and airs—well known as “ Moore’s Melodies ”—is now published in one small cheap volume.

We know the authors of many of the airs composed within the last 200 years : but these form the smallest portion of the whole body of Irish music. All the rest have come down from old times, scattered fragments of exquisite beauty, that remind us of the refined musical culture of our forefathers. To this last class belong such well-known airs as Saviourneen Dheelish, Shule Aroon, Molly Asthore, The Boyne Water, Garryowen, Patrick’s Day, Eileen Aroon, Langolee (Dear Harp of my Country), The Groves of Blarney (The Last Rose of Summer), &c., &c. To illustrate what is here said, I may mention that of about 120 Irish airs in all “ Moore’s Melodies,” we know the authors of less than a dozen : as to the rest, nothing is known either of the persons who composed them or of the times of their composition.

As the Scotch of the western coasts and islands of Scotland were the descendants of Irish colonists, preserving the same language and the same traditions, and as the people of the two countries kept up intimate intercourse with each other for many centuries, the national music of Scotland, is as might be expected, of much the same general character as that of Ireland. The relationship of Irish and Scotch music may be stated as follows. There is in Scotland a large body of national melodies, composed by native musicians, airs that are Scotch in every sense, and not found in Irish collections. In Ireland there is a much larger body of airs, acknowledged on all hands to be purely Irish, and not found in Scotch collections. But outside of these are great numbers of airs



common to the two countries, and included in both Scotch and Irish collections. In regard to a considerable proportion of them, it is now impossible to determine whether they are originally Irish or Scotch. A few are claimed in Ireland that are certainly Scotch ; but a very large number claimed by Scotland are really Irish, of which the well-known air Eileen Aroon or Robin Adair is an example.

From the earliest times it was a common practice among the Irish harpers to travel through Scotland. How close was the musical connexion between the two countries is hinted at by the Four Masters, when in recording the death of Mulrony Mac Carroll they call him the "chief minstrel of Ireland and Scotland" : and there is abundant evidence to show that this connexion was kept up till the close of the eighteenth century. Ireland was long the school for Scottish harpers, as it was for those of Wales : "Till within the memory of persons still living, the school for Highland poetry and music was Ireland ; and thither professional men were sent to be accomplished in these arts."\* Such facts as these sufficiently explain why so many Irish airs have become naturalised in Scotland.

It is not correct to separate and contrast the music of Ireland and that of Scotland as if they belonged to two different races. They are in reality an emanation direct from the heart of one Celtic people ; and they form a body of national melody superior to that of any other nation in the world.†

\* Jameson's ed. of *Letters from the North of Scotland* (1818), vol. ii., p. 65, note.

† Those who wish to follow up the study of Irish music and its literature will find much information in the following works :—O'Curry's *Lectures on the subject in his Manners and Customs*, and the corresponding portion of Sullivan's *Introduction* : Dr. William Stokes's *Life of Petrie* : Petrie's *Ancient Music of Ireland*, including the Preface : Bunting's Prefaces to his three volumes, including Ferguson's and Petrie's Essays, in the third volume : Lynch, *Cambrensis Eversus*, chap. iv. : Joyce's *Ancient Irish Music and Irish Music and Song* : Graham's *Introduction to Robinson's collection of Irish airs*. Remark also what is said of Irish music preserved in the British Museum, in the note at p. 592, *supra*.

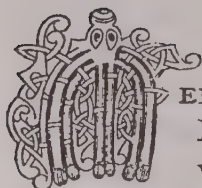


FIG. 160.—Ornament on top of Devenish Round Tower. (From Petrie's Round Towers.)

## CHAPTER XVIII

### MEDICINE AND MEDICAL DOCTORS

#### SECTION I. *Medical Doctors.*



EDICINE and Surgery were carefully studied in Ireland from the very earliest times. There was a distinct professional class of physicians who underwent a regular course of education and practical training, and whose qualifications and privileges were universally recognised. Those intended for the profession were usually educated by being apprenticed to a physician of standing, in whose house they lived during their pupilage, and by whom they were instructed. This profession, like others in ancient Ireland, became in great measure hereditary in certain families; but it does not seem to have become specialised to any extent, so that the same person commonly practised both as a physician and as a surgeon. The ancient Irish name for a physician is *liaig* [leea], which is radically the same as the old English word *leech*.

The Irish, like the Greeks and other ancient nations, had their great mythical physicians, of whom the most distinguished was the Dedannan leech-god Diancecht [Dianket]. His name signifies 'vehement power,' and marvellous stories are related of his healing skill; similar to those of some old Greek physicians. He is celebrated in many ancient authorities, including Cormac's Glossary

(p. 56) : and he is mentioned prominently in some eighth-century copies of Irish incantations for health and long life given by Zeuss in his "Grammatica Celtica," showing his wide-spread reputation twelve hundred years ago. He had a son Midach and a daughter Airmeda, both of whom in some respects excelled himself ; and in the story of the Second Battle of Moytura\* we are told that he grew at last so jealous of Midach that he killed him. And after a time there grew up from the young physician's grave 365 herbs from the 365 joints and sinews and members of his body, each herb with mighty virtue to cure diseases of the part it grew from. His sister Airmeda plucked up the herbs, and carefully sorting them, wrapped them up in her mantle. But the jealous old Diancecht came and mixed them all up, so that now no leech has complete knowledge of their distinctive qualities " unless "—adds the story—" the Holy Spirit should teach him " : this last remark inserted by some Christian redactor. The notion that there are 365 joints, sinews, and members in the human body is found elsewhere, as in the old Irish religious treatise called *Na Arrada*,† which, according to the editor (Kuno Meyer), was composed probably not later than the eighth century. As the Dedannans had their Diancecht, so all the other mythical colonies had their physicians, who are named in the legends.‡

Coming to a later period, but still beyond the fringe of authentic history, we find in several authorities a record of the tradition that in the second century before Christ, Josina, the ninth king of Scotland, was educated in Ireland by the native physicians, and that he wrote a treatise " On the virtues and power of herbs."§ Whatever credit we may attach to this tradition, it shows that the Irish physicians had a reputation abroad for great skill at a very early period.

\* Rev. Celt., xii. 69.

‡ O'Curry, MS. Mat., 221.

† Or " De Arreis " : in Rev. Celt., xv. § Harris's Ware, Writers, p. 306

Medical doctors figure conspicuously in the Tales of the Red Branch Knights. A whole medical corps accompanied the Ulster army during the war of the Táin. They were under the direction of Fingin Faithliaig\* (the 'prophetic leech': pron. faw-lee), King Concobar's physician, who had his residence at Ferta Fingin on the brow of Slieve Fuaid in Armagh. Each man of his company carried, slung from his waist, a bag full of medicaments; and at the end of each day's fighting, whether between numbers or individuals, the leeches came forward and applied their salves.† At the battle of Crinna, fought A.D. 226, a Munster chief named Teige was badly wounded, after which he remained at Tara under the care of a skilful physician, also named Fingin Faithliaig, who ultimately cured him.‡ These legendary records are mentioned to show how well the profession was recognised in Ireland even from the far distant times of tradition and romance.

The medicine bag carried by a physician was called *lés* [lace]: and how general was the custom is indicated by the expression in the Amra, that the state of Columba's companions after his death was like that of a physician attempting to cure without his *lés*; as much as to say that a leech without his medicine bag was quite helpless. Occasionally the medicine bag was called a *fer-bolg*, 'man-bag': but this term more commonly means the bag for keeping a set of chessmen.

The first notice of an individual physician we find in the annals of Christian times occurs under A.D. 860, where the death is recorded of Maelodar O'Tinnri, "the best physician in Ireland": but from that period downwards the annals record a succession of eminent physicians, whose reputation, like that of the Irish scholars of other professions, reached the Continent. Even so late as the

\* For all about him, see O'Curry, MS. Mat., 641, and Man. & Cust., II. 97: also LL, 89, b, 25.

† Miss Hull, Cuch. Saga, 215.

‡ Keating, 326.



beginning of the seventeenth century, when medicine had been successfully studied in Ireland for more than a thousand years, Van Helmont of Brussels, a distinguished physician and writer on medical subjects, gave a brief but very correct account of the Irish physicians of his time, their books and their remedies, and praised them for their skill. He says :—

“ The Irish nobility have in every family a domestic physician, who has a tract of land free for his remuneration, and who is appointed, not on account of the amount of learning he brings away in his head from colleges, but because he can cure disorders. These doctors obtain their medical knowledge chiefly from books belonging to particular families left them by their ancestors, in which are laid down the symptoms of the several diseases, with the remedies annexed : which remedies are *vernacula*—the productions of their own country. Accordingly the Irish are better managed in sickness than the Italians, who have a physician in every village.”\*

From the earliest times reached by our records the kings and great Irish families had physicians attached to their households, whose office was, as in other professions, hereditary. In the tenth century the physicians, like the rest of the community, took family-names : and there are abundant notices in Irish writings of the household hereditary physicians of most of the leading chiefs. The O'Callanans were physicians to the Mac Carthys of Desmond ; the O'Cassidys, of whom individuals of eminence are recorded,† to the Maguires of Fermanagh ; the O'Lees, to the O'Flahertys of Connaught ; and the O'Hickeys, to the O'Briens of Thomond, to the O'Kennedys of Ormond, and to the Macnamaras of Clare.‡ From what a remote time the two last-mentioned families—the O'Lees and

\* Translated from Van Helmont's *Confessio Authoris*, p. 13 : Amstelod, Ed. Elzev., 1648. † As in FM, at A.D. 1322, 1335, 1450, 1504.

‡ For more about medical families, see O'Donovan, FM, vol. i. p. 494 : Gough's Camden, Ed. 1789, III. 665 : an article in Duffy's Mag., II. 273, unsigned, but written, as I believe, by Dr. William Wilde : and Census of Ireland for 1851, Report on Tables of Deaths.

O'Hickeys—drew their hereditary leechcraft may be inferred from the very names of the two ancestors from whom the family names were derived. At whatever time these two men lived, they must have sprung into celebrity on account of their skill in medicine: so much so that their ordinary names were changed to *ícidhe* [eekee], the 'healer,' and *liaig* [leea], the 'leech'; and O'Lee signifies the descendant of the leech, and O'Hickey of the healer. Their profession, like that of the other medical families, was transmitted from father to son for hundreds of years, till it finally died out in times comparatively recent: a good example of the extraordinary tenacity with which families clung to hereditary offices in Ireland.

The O'Shiels were physicians to the Mac Mahons of Oriel, and to the Mac Coghlan's of Delvin, in the present King's County: and their hereditary estate here, which is near the village of Ferbane, is still called Ballyshiel, "O'Shiel's town." Colgan states that in his time—seventeenth century—the O'Shiels were widely spread through Ireland, and were celebrated for their skill in natural science and medicine. Owen O'Shiel was greatly distinguished as a physician in the same century; he attended the army of Owen Roe O'Neill, and fell fighting on the Catholic side in a battle fought near Letterkenny in 1650.\* Only quite recently—in 1889—Dr. Shiel, an eminent physician of Ballyshannon, left by his will a large fortune to found a hospital for the poor in that town. So that even still the hereditary genius of the family continues to exercise its benign influence.

The amount of remuneration of a family leech depended on his own eminence and on the status of the king or chief in whose household he lived. The stipend usually consisted of a tract of land and a residence in the neighbourhood, held free of all rent and tribute, together with certain allowances and perquisites: and the physician

\* See the article in Duffy's Mag. referred to in last note,

might practise for fee outside his patron's household. Five hundred acres of land was a usual allowance : and some of these estates—now ordinary townlands—retain the family names to this day : such as Farrancassidy in Fermanagh, the *ferann* or land of the O'Cassidys ; and Ballyshiel, already mentioned. The household physician to a king—who should always be an *ollave-leech*, that is, one who had attained the highest rank in the profession (p. 65, *supra*)—held a very dignified position, and indeed lived like a prince, with a household and dependents of his own. He was always among the king's immediate retinue, and was entitled to a distinguished place at table. The practice of keeping physicians as well as other professional men in the households of chiefs continued till the end of the sixteenth or the beginning of the seventeenth century, when the old Irish order began to be broken up everywhere.

Speaking generally, the best physicians were those attached to noble households. Those unattached lived by their fees ; the amounts for the several operations or attendances being defined by the Brehon Laws.\* A qualified physician—as we have said—kept pupils or graduates who lived in his house and accompanied him in his visitations to learn his methods. If he had to remain for any time in the house of the patient, he was entitled to diet for himself and for his pupils, besides his fees.† From an entry in the Brehon Law we infer that in going his rounds he himself usually rode on horseback, like the *ollave* poet ; for the law (II. 119) states that when a physician was distrained, one of the things that might be taken was his *echlaisc* or whip.

We have already seen (p. 207) that a man who inflicted a wound had, on conviction, to pay a certain *eric*-fine to the wounded person. A leech who, through carelessness, or neglect, or gross want of skill, failed to cure a wound,

\* See Br. Laws, III. 477 : IV. 301 : and Sullivan, *Intro.*, 280.

† Census, 1851, Table of Deaths, p. 23.

had to pay the same fine to the patient as if he had inflicted the wound with his own hand. When a physician treated a wound, a certain time was allowed to test whether he had made a good cure. If it broke out afresh before the end of the testing-time, the cure was regarded as unsuccessful; and the leech had to return the fee and pay the usual eric-fine. Moreover, if, during treatment, he and his pupils had lived in the patient's house, he had to refund the cost of maintenance. But he might provide against these penalties—as is stated below—by first obtaining a guarantee of immunity. The testing-time for a wound of the hand or arm was a year; for a wound of the leg a little more; for a wound of the head, *i.e.* probably a fracture of the skull, three years. After the testing-time the physician and the wounded were both exempt, no matter what happened.\*

Those who had gone through the prescribed course of study and training were technically and legally qualified physicians, and were probably able to produce a certificate or diploma of qualification. A person might also set up as a leech and practise without any regular qualification—an “unlawful physician,” as he was called, meaning not legally recognised. There was no law to prevent this; but such persons were subject to certain disabilities and dangers not incurred by the regular practitioner: something like quack doctors of the present time. A qualified physician performing a serious surgical operation, such as removing a bone, a joint, or a limb, had previously to get a guarantee of immunity: if he neglected this, he was liable to the usual damages in case of failure—taking the element of time into consideration. The unqualified practitioner had of course to take the same precautions or abide the consequences; and *he should also give notice that he was not a regular physician*. In lighter operations, such

\* Br. Laws, III. 347-9, 533, 535; and Table of Deaths, 1851, p. 23: see also Br. Laws, V., pp. 147, 149, 487, 489.



as blood-letting, extracting a small splinter, &c., the regular physician was free from liability without any guarantee: while if there was no guarantee, the other was liable if unsuccessful.\*

It is worthy of remark that in our legendary history female physicians are often mentioned. Though the several accounts of these are shadowy enough, the legends must have had some foundation: and at any rate we see that in ancient Ireland the idea was abroad which is so extensively coming into practice in our own day.†

## 2. *Medical Manuscripts.*

The physicians of ancient Ireland, like those of other countries, derived a large part of their special learning from books, which in those times were all manuscripts. The Irish medical MSS. were written on vellum in a peculiar hand generally easy to recognise, small, neat, and regular. The members of each medical family had generally their own special book, which was handed down reverently from father to son, and which, at long intervals, when it had become damaged and partly illegible through age, was carefully transcribed into a new volume. Several of these venerable leech-books are still preserved, as mentioned farther on.

But besides these special books belonging to particular families, there were many others, which were copied and multiplied from time to time; so that the chief medical families had libraries containing such medical knowledge as was then available. Many medical tracts, too, are found scattered through the large miscellaneous MSS.: for instance, the Yellow Book of Lecan contains four such tracts. The very early medical works in Ireland shared

\* Br. Laws, III. 321.

† O'Curry, MS. Mat., 221: Tromdamh, 119.

in the general destruction of books spoken of at p. 489, *supra*, and those that remain are of comparatively late date.\* The oldest medical manuscript in Ireland appears to be one copied in 1352, mentioned below; but there are others older in the British Museum. Of those remaining, a vast number, written from the thirteenth to the beginning of the eighteenth century, are preserved in the libraries of Dublin, London, and Oxford, forming a collection of medical literature in Irish, probably the largest in existence in any one tongue.

Many of the manuscripts consist of the works of classical medical authors, to which the Irish physicians obviously had full access; such as the Aphorisms of Hippocrates, the works of Galen, Rhazes, Avicenna, Serapion, Dioscorides, &c. Some were copies of one or more of those in Latin; but many were translations into Irish: and all, whether Latin or Irish, were accompanied with native commentaries.† The great bulk of the Irish medical literature is made up of these texts and commentaries: and the Irish physicians of each generation added the knowledge derived from other books or from their own experience. It may be interesting to give a brief description of a few of the existing MSS., which will serve as examples of all.

The manner in which these books were generally compiled, and the motives of the compilers, may be gathered from the following translation of a prefatory statement in Irish by the writer of a medical manuscript of the year 1352, now in the Royal Irish Academy,—a statement breathing a noble spirit worthy of the best traditions of the faculty:—

“May the merciful God have mercy on us all. I have here collected practical rules from several works, for the honour of God, for

\* In the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, there is a Catalogue of the Academy's Med. mss. drawn up by O'Curry.

† Table of Deaths, 1851, pp. 26, 30, 31, 44: Table, 1842, p. iv.

the benefit of the Irish people, for the instruction of my pupils, and for the love of my friends, and of my kindred. I have translated them from Latin into Gaelic from the authority of Galen in the last Book of his Practical Pantheon, and from the Book of the Prognostics of Hippocrates. These are things gentle, sweet, profitable, and of little evil, things which have been often tested by us and by our instructors. I pray God to bless those doctors who will use this book ; and I lay it on their souls as an injunction, that they extract not sparingly from it ; that they fail not on account of neglecting the practical rules [herein contained] ; and more especially that they do their duty devotedly in cases where they receive no pay [on account of the poverty of the patients]. I implore every doctor, that before he begins his treatment he remember God the father of health, to the end that his work may be finished prosperously. Moreover let him not be in mortal sin, and let him implore the patient to be also free from grievous sin. Let him offer up a secret prayer for the sick person, and implore the Heavenly Father, the physician and balm-giver for all mankind, to prosper the work he is entering upon and to save him from the shame and discredit of failure.\*"

The Book of the O'Hickeys, now in the Royal Irish Academy, commonly known as the " Lily of Medicine," is a translation into Irish of a Latin work, *Lilium Medicinæ*, originally written by Bernard Gordon—a Continental physician—in 1303. This manuscript was at one time greatly celebrated among the Irish doctors.

The Book of the O'Lees in the Royal Irish Academy is a large-sized vellum manuscript, written in 1443, partly in Latin and partly in Irish. The pages are curiously ruled and divided, so that the writing forms patterns resembling astrological figures. It is a complete system of medicine, treating, among other things, of putrid fevers ; of abscesses and pustules ; of wounds, poisons, and hydrophobia ; of affections of the brain, eye, stomach, and other parts ; of the period of life and time of year when certain diseases

\* Census, Table of Deaths, 1851, p. 31. It should be remembered that this Preface was written at a time when—in England, as elsewhere—" it was not usual [for physicians] to give gratuitous advice to the poor in any circumstances, however pressing " (Social England, III, p. 149).

usually come on ; and of the temperature or “ cardinal point ” that influences them.\*

The Book of the O'Shiels, now also in the Royal Irish Academy, which was transcribed in 1657 from some manuscript of unknown date, not now in existence, consists partly of translations and partly of dissertations on the medical properties of herbs. It contains a system of medical science still more complete and scientific than even the Book of the O'Lees.

The Book of Mac Anlega was transcribed in 1512 by Melaghlin Mac Anlega (whose name—Mac Anlega—signifies the ‘ son of the physician ’) from an older book lent him by one of the O'Mulconrys, a family noted for their Irish scholarship. It is a commentary on ancient classical writers on medicine, those named at p. 605, and others.

### 3. *Diseases.*

The general names for disease, sickness, or ailment, were *galar* (still used), *aincess*, and sometimes *teidm* [taim]. Other words now in use are *breðitecht*, *éagcruas*, and *aicíd*. All the chief diseases and epidemics we are now acquainted with were known and studied by the Irish physicians. In early times great plagues were of frequent occurrence all over the world ; and Ireland was not exempt. A pestilence or any great mortality was denoted by several words, the most usual being *tam* or *tamh* [tauv]. *Teidm* [taim] was often used : but this was also applied to any severe seizure in an individual, such as colic. *Duinebath* [dinnevah] is ‘ a plague,’ literally ‘ man-death.’ *Dibath* and *ár* are often used in the same sense, as in *bó-dibath* and *bo-ár*, both denoting cattle-plague, from *bó*, ‘ a cow.’ In later times the word *plaig* [plaw], a plague, was borrowed from Latin

\* See, for a curious account of this book, Iar Connaught, pp. 70, 71, where the legend is given that it was brought from I-Brazil or Fairyland, and that the person who found and brought it—one of the O'Lees—though previously ignorant of medicine, at once became a great physician by reading it. See also Table of Deaths, 1842, p. iv.



*plaga*. Lastly, a terrible pestilence of any kind was sometimes designated by the expressive word *scuab*, 'a besom or broom.'

The victims of a plague were commonly buried in one spot, which was fenced round and preserved as in a manner sacred for ever after. In Cormac's Glossary (p. 160) it is stated that the place of such wholesale interment was called *tamhlachta* or *tamhlacht*. i.e. 'plague-grave,' from *tamh* and *lacht*, a monument or memorial over the dead. *Tamhlacht*, which is still a living word, has given name to the village of Tallaght near Dublin, where the Parthalonian colony, who all died of a plague in one week, were interred. On the side of Tallaght hill are to be seen to this day a number of pagan graves and burial mounds.\* Just by the chapel of Shanbally near Monkstown below Cork, there is a large rock with some ancient remains on its top; it is called on the Ordnance map Carrigaplau, representing the Irish *Carraig-a'-phlaigh*, 'the rock of the plague'; but the popular anglicised name is Carrigafly, which better represents the pronunciation, the *p* being aspirated as it ought. Probably the victims of some long-forgotten local plague were interred here.

One of the popular fancies regarding a plague was that it was a malignant living thing which roamed about the country, bringing sickness and death wherever it went. When the deadly plague called Cromm Connail, in the sixth century, made its way to Kerry, the terrified people sent for St. Mac Créiche† to save them. He celebrated Mass, and prayed, and sounded his little consecrated bell, whereupon the people saw a fiery bolt from heaven coming towards them: and it fell on the *Cromm Connail* so that it killed it and reduced its body to ashes.‡ This notion

\* See FM, A.M. 2820: and Joyce, *Irish Names of Places*, i. 161.

† A Kerryman, the patron of Kilmacrehy in Clare.

‡ O'Curry, MS. Mat., 631, 632.

has trickled down through generations to our own day. Many years ago an intelligent peasant—a delightful old shanachie—told me that on one occasion, before his time, when the plague in its fearful career was approaching a certain townland, the people, in great terror, sent a wise old herb-leech to stand guard on the hither bank of the river that separated them from the next territory. And when the evil thing approached and was about to cross, the old man chanted in a loud voice a sort of incantation commanding it to proceed no farther ; on which it turned back and the townland was saved. My informant repeated for me the incantation—in Irish verse—but I had not the forethought to take it down.

The Irish annalists more often attribute the plague to demons. We find the following entry in Tigernach's Annals :—

[A.D. 1084.] “ A great pestilence [*teidm mor*] in this year, which killed a fourth of the men of Ireland. It began in the south and spread throughout the four quarters of Ireland. The *causa causans* of that pestilence was this—demons came out of the northern isles of the world, to wit, three battalions, and in each battalion there were thirty and ten hundred and two thousand [3030 each], as Ængus Oc the son of the Dagda [p. 260, *supra*], related to Gilla Lugan, who used to haunt the fairy mound [*side*] every year on Samain night [the eve of the first of November]. And he himself beheld at Maistiú the battalion of them which was destroying Leinster. Even so, they were seen by Gilla Lugan's son : and wherever their heat or fury reached, there their venom [*nem*] was taken. For there was a sword of fire out of the gullet of each of them, and every one of them was as high as the clouds of heaven. So that is the cause of the pestilence.”\*

So also the Four Masters under A.D. 986 :—“ Druidical “ or magical sickness was caused by demons in the east of “ Ireland, which caused mortality of men plainly before “ people's eyes.” The idea of disease inflicted by demons

\* Stokes in *Rev. Celt.*, xvii., p. 416.

found its way into the legends of the saints. Adamnan relates that in the time of St. Columba, a host of demons invaded the island of Tirree and brought pestilential diseases to the monastery there; of which many of the monks sickened, and some died.

Within historic times, the most remarkable and destructive of all the ancient plagues was the *Blefed*, or *Buide-Connaill* [boy-connell] or yellow plague, which swept through Ireland twice, in the sixth and seventh centuries, and which we know from outer sources desolated all Europe about the same time. The Irish records abound in notices of its ravages. There is a curious legend in the Life of St. Mochua, that when the Sil-Murray were suffering from this pestilence, the saint cured them, and transferred the yellow colour of their skin to his crosier, which was thence called the *Bachal-bhuidhe*, the 'yellow crosier.'\*

Many other special plagues are recorded in the annals. During the fourteenth century the country was hardly ever free from pestilence of some kind. The worst of all was the Black Death, which, judging of its ravages by the appalling description of Friar Clyn,† was as destructive in Ireland as elsewhere. In 1375 and 1378 certain persons are recorded to have died of *fiolun* [filloon], a scorbutic or scrofulous disease of the skin and joints:‡ this is still a living word, and is used to denote sometimes scurvy and sometimes king's evil. The Four Masters and other annalists record the prevalence in 1361 of a plague called *Cluithe-an-righ* [cluhanree], or 'the king's game'; but what was the nature of the disease or why so called is not known. In 1404, the Annals of Loch-Cé notice numerous diseases that broke out that year, especially

\* Stokes, *Lives of SS.*, 287.

† Clyn's Annals, 1348; published by the Irish Archæol. Society, 1849. See also on this, Joyce, *Short History of Ireland*, p. 316.

‡ See FM under the above dates.

*galar-na-leptae*, the 'bed distemper,' which Hennessy thinks was a sort of ague.

The idea that a plague could not travel over sea farther than nine waves was very general, both in pagan and Christian times. It has been already related (p. 308, *supra*) how St. Colman, with his companions, fled from the yellow plague to an island somewhere near Cork, so as to put a distance of nine waves between them and the mainland.

There are several terms in Irish for cutaneous diseases of the nature of leprosy. Of these *samthrusc* is applied to a great epidemic of the sixth century, which was a sort of mange or scaly leprosy.\* *Clam* and *trosc* were also in common use for some form of the same disease, as well as for a leper. But the most general word for leprosy is *lobor*, cognate with Latin *lepra*. In the oldest Irish writings, as in the eighth-century glosses of Zeuss, *lobor* is used in the sense simply of *infirmus*, or 'sick': but later on it came to be applied in a special sense to a leper. We are told in Cormac's Glossary (p. 27) that the word *bill* also denoted a leper.

Some cutaneous disease, very virulent and infectious, known by names—such as *lobor*—that indicate a belief that it was leprosy, existed in Ireland from a very early date: but Wilde† and other experts of our day, doubt if it was true leprosy. Whatever it was, it would seem to have been a well-recognised disease in the fifth century; for we are told, in one of the Lives of St. Patrick, that at one time he maintained a leper in his own house. After his time our literature, especially the Lives of the Saints, abounds with notices of the disease. We read in the historical tale of the Boruma that immediately before the Battle of Dunbolg, the young warrior Ron Kerr, having smeared himself all over with a calf's blood mixed with

\* Ann. Ulst., A.D. 553: also Tigernach.

† Census, 1842, Table of Deaths, p. xxxvi.



dough of rye, so as to look like a leper, went in this disguise as a spy into the enemy's camp, from which he brought back a report to his own commander, Branduff, king of Leinster.\* We have other instances of the same sort of disguise :† from which we can infer that this disease was painfully common and familiar, and that the skin of those afflicted with it presented a squamous or scaly appearance with blood oozing through the sores.

The annals record several individual deaths by leprosy : and sometimes it broke out as an epidemic which carried off great numbers. From the time of St. Patrick till the seventeenth century the country appears never to have been free from it. Gerard Boate (p. 101) states that in his time (1645) it had disappeared ; and he attributes its former prevalence to the habit of eating salmon out of season. He tells us that it was specially prevalent in Munster : and his assertion would seem to derive some support from an incidental expression in an Irish authority very much older than his time, the Book of Rights (p. 49), where the mountainous district of Slieve Lougher in Kerry is called *Luachair-na-lubhair*, ' Lougher of the lepers.'

In the middle ages lepers were treated everywhere in Europe with great consideration and tenderness. In consequence of this, in Ireland at least, they gave themselves airs and became impudent and exacting. We are told in the Life of St. Fechin that a leper full of disease from crown to sole once came to him at Fore and made a very preposterous and impudent request : " for "—adds the narrative—" he was wanton [*og macnus*] as is the manner of lepers."‡

Though the Irish physicians derived a large part of their information from the writings of foreigners, yet they

\* Silva Gad., 415.

† See O'Curry, MS. Mat., 528 : Rev. Celt., xvi. 282 : and Courtship of Emer, 152, 8.

‡ Rev. Celt., xii. 343. For another instance see Stokes, Three Irish Homilies, p. 79. See also Stokes in Introd. to Trip. Life, p. cxcvi.

had native names for most of the indigenous diseases, which is one of the circumstances indicating that the science was of home-growth—a fact also attested by the native traditions and records. Many examples of native Irish medical nomenclature might be adduced in addition to those already given : but I will content myself with the following :—

The annals record several outbreaks of smallpox and many individual deaths from it. It was known by two names, both still in use in different parts of the country :—*bolgach* or ‘ pustule disease ’ (*bolg*, ‘ a bag or pustule ’), and *galar-brecc*, the ‘ speckled disease.’\*

Consumption was but too well known, then as now. A person in consumption was called *anfobracht* or *anbobracht*, which in Cormac’s Glossary (p. 6) is explained, “ a person without *bracht* or fat ” ; and in the Brehon Laws (i. 141 bot.) “ one who has no juice of strength.” Murkertagh O’Brien, the powerful king of Munster, who is counted among the kings of Ireland, was struck down by a wasting disease—evidently consumption—till he became an *anbobracht*, which O’Donovan (FM, A.D. 1114) translates ‘ a living skeleton ’ : so that he retired to the Monastery of Lismore, where he died in 1114. A usual term for consumption was *serg*, that is, ‘ withering or decaying.’

One of the eighth-century Irish incantations noticed at p. 631, farther on, is against *galar fuail*, disease of the bladder or kidney—literally ‘ disease of the urine.’ That diseases of this class were studied and understood is indicated by the fact that in an Irish mediæval tract, copied about the year 1500 from an original some centuries older, renal calculus is designated in Irish, *Lecc in aráin*, ‘ stone in the kidney.’ In the same tract, which has been edited by Dr. Stokes,† *chiragra*, or ‘ gout in the hand,’ is explained in Irish by *crupan na lám*, ‘ cramp or spasm of

\* See FM, A.D. 1327, note o ; and A.D. 774, note x.

† Irish Glosses in a Tract on Lat. Decl., p. 60, 233 ; and 61, 246.

the hands': and ophthalmia is *galar síla*, 'disease of the eye.' This word *crupán* [cruppaun], 'a spasm or seizure,' is still used in parts of Ireland to denote a paralytic affection in cattle: it was also applied to convulsions. In the Tripartite Life and other old documents, colic is designated by *tregat*, modern *treaghaid*, which is still a spoken word. [A.D. 986] "a colic [*treghaid*] in the east of Ireland " caused " by demons, which inflicted slaughter on people: and " they [the demons] appeared clearly before men's eyes."\* One of the early kings of Ireland was called Aed Uaridnech (A.D. 603 to 611), or 'Aed of the shivering disease,' no doubt ague.† Palsy was known by the descriptive name *crith-lám* [crih-lauv], 'trembling of the hands,' from *crith*, 'shaking,' and *lám* or *lámh*, 'a hand.'‡ Epilepsy, or "falling sickness," was called in Irish *galar Póil*, 'Paul's sickness,' from a notion, prevalent in Ireland as elsewhere, that St. Paul, after one of his visions, was subject to such a collapse of the nervous system as resembled or was identical with an epileptic fit. A person subject to falling sickness was called by the expressive name *talmáidheach* [tallavceagh], 'prone to the earth,' from *talamh*, 'the earth.'§

St. Camin of Inis-Celtra died in 653 of *teine-buirr*, 'fire of swelling'—St. Anthony's fire or erysipelas—which withered away all his body, so that his bones fell asunder as they laid him in the grave. In one of Zeuss's eighth-century glosses, cancer is explained by two Irish words, *tuthle* and *ailse*, the latter of which is still in use in the same sense: and elsewhere in the same glosses another native word for the same disease occurs, *úrphasiu*.|| Diarrhoea was called in Irish *buinnech*, i.e. 'flux,' from *buinne*, 'wave or stream.'¶ Under A.D. 785, the Annals

\* Tigernach, in Rev. Celt., xvii. 345. See also Trip. Life, p. 228, 21; and p. 229.

† Silva Gad., 418: FM, A.D. 601.

‡ Mac Carthy, Cod.-Pal.-Vat., p. 61. § O'Donovan, Suppl. O'R., 707.

|| Zeuss, 73, 22; 81, 1; 264, 24; 266, 9; 266, 46; 775, 44.

¶ Rev. Celt., xiii. 119; and Buinneach in O'Reilly, Dict.

of Ulster record the ravages of a plague called *scamach*, which in the Annals of Clonmacnoise is anglicised *skawaghe*: possibly some skin disease of a *squamous* or *scaly* nature.\*

Madness has already been treated of (p. 224).

Our annals teem with accounts of great cattle-plagues or murrains: commonly called *bo-dibad* [bo-yeeva] or 'cow-destruction': and sometimes *bo-baith*† and *bo-ár* (*baith*, 'death': *ár*, 'slaughter'). Special cattle diseases were *baccach*, the dry murrain (literally 'lameness'): *moilgarb*, a cutaneous disease of some kind, previously unknown, broke out among cattle, A.D. 987. There was



FIG. 16r.

A Conach, as described in text, full size: of silver, in which are embedded a number of crystals, azure and amber-coloured. (From Kilk. Arch. Journ. for 1864-66, pp. 323, 324.)

another kind of cattle disease called *conach*, believed to be produced by swallowing a sort of caterpillar with that name. This disease was treated by causing the animal to drink water in which a *conach*—that is, a metallic amulet in the shape of the caterpillar—had been steeped. The closeness with which animal diseases were studied is indicated by the number of native names for horse-distempers, of which the following are given by the glossator on the Senchus Mór, but without any explanation:—*odbach*, *adbuch*, *iudha-fothuch*, *lec-os-cru*, and *delgniuch*; while many others incident to animals in general will be found in the MS. referred to in the note on this passage in the law.‡

\* FM, A.D. 781, note o. † Corm. Gloss., p. 21. ‡ Br. Laws, III., p. 7,



It should be mentioned that a Paper by H. Cameron Gillies, MD., on "Gaelic Names of Diseases and of diseased States," in the "Caledonian Medical Journal," and reprinted as a pamphlet in 1898, contains a great deal of information on this subject. It is written from a Scotch rather than from an Irish standpoint, which makes it all the more interesting to the Irish student.

#### 4. *Treatment.*

**Hospitals.**—The idea of a hospital, or a house of some kind for the treatment of the sick or wounded, was familiar in Ireland from remote pagan times. In some of the tales of the Táin we read that in the time of the Red Branch Knights there was a hospital for the wounded at Emain called *Bróinbherg*, the 'house of sorrow.'\* But coming to historic times, we know that there were hospitals all over the country, many of them in connexion with monasteries. Some were for sick persons in general; some were special, as, for instance, leper-houses. Monastic hospitals and leper-houses are very often mentioned in the annals. These were charitable institutions, supported by, and under the direction and management of, the monastic authorities.

But there were secular hospitals for the common use of the people of the *tuath* or district: hence they were called *forus tuaithe* [too-ha], the 'house of the territory.'† These came under the direct cognisance of the Brehon Law, which laid down certain general regulations for their management. Patients who were in a position to do so were expected to pay for food, medicine, and the attendance of a physician. In all cases cleanliness and ventilation seem to have been well attended to; for it was expressly prescribed in the law that any house in which sick persons were treated should be free from dirt, should have four open doors—"that the sick man may be seen from every side"—and should have a stream of water running across

\* Keating, 271.

† *Forus tuaithe*, Br. Laws, IV. 302, §: 303, s. 9.

it through the middle of the floor.\* These regulations—rough and ready as they were, though in the right direction—applied also to a house or private hospital kept by a doctor for the treatment of his patients. The regulation about the four open doors and the stream of water may be said to have anticipated by a thousand years the present open-air treatment for consumption. Even when only one person was under cure in a house, if he belonged to the higher classes, who could afford to pay for all necessary accommodation, we generally find much the same arrangements carried out. The Munster chief, Cormac Cas, after being wounded in the head in a battle fought in the third century, was treated in a house of this kind at Duntryleague, in the County Limerick.†

If a person wounded another or injured him bodily in any way, without justification, he—or his *finē* or immediate circle of relations if he himself was out of reach—was obliged by the Brehon Law to pay for “Sick maintenance” (called *othrus* or *folach-othrusa*), i.e. the cost of maintaining the wounded man in a hospital, either wholly or partly, according to the circumstances of the case, till recovery or death; which payment included the fees of the physician, and one or more attendants according to the rank of the injured person.‡ This provision, so far as it went, answered to the modern arrangement of insurance companies to give a weekly allowance during illness caused by accident. The injured person might either go to a hospital or be treated at home. But in some cases at least the aggressor might choose either to select his own home as the place of treatment of the person he had wounded, or to send him the determined amount of expenses and let him choose his own place of treatment.§ Those of the very high grades of society never went to a hospital in

\* Br. Laws, I. 131 : Sullivan, *Introd.*, 319.

† Silva Gad., 129.

‡ Corm. Gloss., 132 (“Othras”) : Br. Laws, I. 131 ; III. 357 ; 471, *et seq.* ; IV. “Sick Maintenance,” in *Index* : Sull., *Introd.*, 234.

§ Br. Laws, V 313.

case of sick maintenance: they were always treated in their own houses; the cost of nursing and medical attendance being defrayed by the wounder, who in this case had his choice either to send a nursetender (a man in the case cited in the law), or pay the cost of maintaining one.

If the patient went to a hospital, his mother was to go with him, if she was living, and available;\* and it is to be presumed the cost of her support also was defrayed by the aggressor. Moreover, it was his duty to see that the patient was properly treated:—that there were the usual four doors and a stream of water; that the bed was properly furnished; that the physician's orders were strictly carried out—for example, the patient was not to be put into a bed forbidden by the doctor, or given prohibited food; and “dogs and fools and female scolds” were to be kept away from him lest he might be worried.† If the wounder neglected this duty, he was liable to penalty. From the frequent mention of sick maintenance in the law, it is obvious that the custom was very general and universally recognised.

Leper hospitals were established in various parts of Ireland, generally in connexion with monasteries, so that they became very general, and are often noticed in the annals. In the time of Henry VIII. all such charitable institutions in connexion with monasteries were suppressed, among them that attached to the priory of St. John's, Dublin. The former prevalence of hospitals of several kinds is attested by the number of places to which they have given names that remain to this day; such as Hospital, Spittal, Spiddal, Leopardstown, properly Lepers-town, near Dublin. &c.‡

**Medicated Baths.**—In Irish historical tales, which we know were to a great extent legendary, we read that the

\* Br. Laws, IV, 303, 333.

† Br. Laws, I. 131; IV. 303.

‡ A list of leper hospitals, formerly in connexion with monasteries, is given in Part II. of the Census, of 1851.

mythical physicians often used medicated baths to heal the wounded. The earliest example of this was in the second battle of Moytura fought by the Dedannans against the Fomorians, where the wonderful skill of Dianket was brought into play. He selected near the battlefield a well called *slán* [slaun], i.e. 'health-giving,' into which he put a number of sanative herbs gathered in every part of Ireland; and over these again he and his daughter and his two sons chanted incantations. During the battle all the wounded Dedannans were brought from the field and plunged into this bath, from which they came out whole and sound and ready to join battle again.\*

While Eremon was king of Ireland, the king of Leinster and his people were sorely harassed by a neighbouring British people who used poisoned weapons, so that the least wound they inflicted was followed by certain death. At last, the king, by the advice of a druid, prepared a bath on the eve of the next battle, into which was poured the milk of 150 white hornless cows. During the battle, as fast as the king's men were wounded they were plunged into this bath, which at once healed them; and by this means the poison tribe were defeated and slaughtered.† In the old epic of the Táin we are told that Fingin, Conobar mac Nessa's physician—the *faith-liaig* or 'prophet-leech,'—cured the wounded Ulstermen by means of baths medicated at one time with the marrow of a great number of cows, and at another with medicinal herbs.‡

This is, of course, all legend, though we may infer from it that medicated baths of some kind were in use in the time of the writers. The ordinary bath was used for some skin-diseases; for instance, for leprosy, as we learn from an incidental expression in Cormac's Glossary (p. 73). Under the word *fothrucud* ('a bath') he says in

\* Rev. Celt., XII. 95, 97.

† Keating, 215; Irish Nennius, 125.

‡ O'Curry, Man. & Cust., II. 101.



explanation :—" bathing for sick persons : and it is for lepers (*doinnlóbru*) that it is oftenest practised."

**Trefning.**—In the Battle of Moyrath, fought A.D. 637—the same battle from which Sweeny ran away distracted (p. 225, *supra*)—a young Irish chief named Cennfaelad [Kenfailla] had his skull fractured by a blow of a sword, after which he was a year under cure at the celebrated school of Tomregan in the present County Cavan. The injured portion of the skull and a portion of the brain were removed, which so cleared his intellect and improved his memory that on his recovery he became a great scholar and a great jurist, whose name—" Kennfaela the Learned "—is to this day well-known in Irish literature.\* He was the author of the *Uraicept na n-ecce* [Oorakeft-nan-aigas], or ' Primer of the Poets,' a work still in existence. Certain Legal Commentaries which have been published, forming part of the Book of Acaill (Br. Laws, III.), have also been attributed to him ; and he was subsequently the founder of a famous school at Derryloran in Tyrone.

The old Irish writer of the Tale accounts for the sudden improvement in Kennfaela's memory by saying that his *brain of forgetfulness* was removed. It would be hardly scientific to reject all this as mere fable. What really happens in such cases is this. Injuries of the head are often followed by loss of memory, or by some other mental disturbance, which in modern times is cured, and the mind restored to its former healthful action—but nothing beyond—by a successful operation on skull and brain. The effects of such cures, which are sufficiently marvellous, have been exaggerated even in our own day ; and in modern medical literature physicians of some standing have left highly-coloured accounts of sudden wonderful improvements of intellect following injuries of the head after cure. Kennfaela's case comes well within

\* Moyrath, 279 to 285, text and notes ; also Br. Laws, III. 89 ; and O'Curry, Man. & Cust., I. 92.

historic times : and the old Irish writer's account seems merely an exaggeration of what was a successful cure. Kennfaela was no doubt a man of exceptional ability, which was turned into a new channel—or rather into its proper channel—when he was forced to give up the profession of arms, with a result that astonished his contemporaries. No doubt a similar explanation will apply to the modern cases, in many of which the exaggeration is at least as great as in the story of Kennfaela—in some instances much greater indeed. We must bear in mind that the mere existence in Irish literature of this story, and of some others like it, shows that this critical operation—trefining or trepanning—was well known and recognised, not only among the faculty but among the general public. In those fighting times, too, the cases must have been sufficiently numerous to afford surgeons good practice.

**Stitching Wounds.**—The art of closing up wounds by stitching was known to the old Irish surgeons. In the story of the death of King Concobar mac Nessa we are told that the surgeons stitched up the wound in his head with thread of gold, because his hair was golden colour.\*

**Cupping and Probing.**—Cupping was commonly practised by the Irish physicians, who for this purpose carried about with them a sort of horn called a *gipne* or *gibne*, as doctors now always carry a stethoscope. This practice was well established long before the tenth century ; for in Cormac's Glossary (p. 91), we find the word *gibne* explained *adarc lege*, a ' leech's [cupping] horn.' An actual case of cupping is mentioned in the *Acallamh*,† where the female leech Beinn had the venom drawn from an old unhealed wound on Cailte's leg, by means of two *fedans* or tubes ; by which the wound was healed. It is stated in the text that these were " the *fedans* of Modarn's daughter Binn " [a former lady-doctor], from which we may infer that they

\* MS. Mat., 638, 6 from bottom ; 641, 18.

† Stokes, *Acall.*, lines 7220–7224 : *Silva Gad.*, 253, 24.

were something more than simple tubes—that they were of some special construction cunningly designed for the operation. On this passage Stokes directs attention to the *Iliad*, iv. 218: and here we find a parallel case among the Homeric Greeks, where the physician Machaon healed an arrow-wound on Menelaus by sucking out the noxious blood and applying salves. The lady-physician Beblinn also treated Cailte for general indisposition by administering five successive emetics at proper intervals, of which the effects of each are fully described in the old text. Beblinn prepared the draughts by steeping certain herbs in water: each draught was different from all the others, and acted differently; and the treatment restored the patient to health.\* A probe (*fraig*) was another instrument regarded as requisite for a physician, like the *gipne*, for, in the Brehon Law (II. 119) the probe and the whip are named as articles belonging to a doctor that might be seized in distraint.

The **Cæsarean Operation** was known and practised. when Eithne, daughter of King Eochaidh Feidlech, was with child, she was drowned by her sister's son Lugaid Sriab n-Derg, who caused the child—afterwards called Furbaide—to be cut from her womb.†

**Sleeping-Draught.**—In one of the oldest of the Irish Tales—the original version of the “Wooing of Emer”‡—it is stated that the warrior-lady Scathach gave Cuculainn a sleeping-draught (*deoch suain*) to keep him from going to battle: it was strong enough to put an ordinary person to sleep for twenty-four hours: but Cuculainn woke up after one hour. This shows that at the early period when this story was written—seventh or eighth century—the Irish had a knowledge of sleeping-potions, and knew how to regulate their strength. .

\* Silva Gad., 252 (Irish text, 222): the translation does not reproduce the details given in its text.

† Rennes Dind., Rev. Celt., xvi. 39; see LL, 199, a, 45; O'Donovan, Suppl. O'R., “Glaise”: and O'Curry, Man. & Cust., I. 290.

‡ Rev. Celt., xi. 449.

**Materia Medica.**—I have stated that some of the medical manuscripts contain descriptions of the medical properties of herbs. But besides these there are regular treatises on *materia medica*, one of which has been translated by Dr. Stokes.\* It consists of a long list of herbs and other substances, with a description of their medical qualities and their application to various diseases. Another similar treatise has been translated by the late Joseph O'Longan, the accomplished scribe of the Royal Irish Academy.† This is a description of the curative qualities of various substances, with directions how to prepare and administer them, the Latin names being given, and also the Irish names in cases of native products.

The chief part of the Irish pharmacopœia consisted of herbs, which are classified, according to the old system, into "moist and dry," "hot and cold": but a few minerals are included, such as iron, copperas, and alum: all produced at home. In the "Battle of Moyrath" (p. 103) we are told that at the accession of King Domnall to the sovereignty of Ireland, A.D. 627, the country was unusually prosperous, one of the evidences being the great knowledge of the virtues of herbs the physicians had attained—an entry which shows that such knowledge was considered a test of a leech's skill. The Irish doctors had the reputation—outside Ireland—of being specially skilled in medicinal botany.

**Various Curative Applications.**—The following are a few examples of the applications for the cure of diseases adopted by Irish physicians within historic times, taken from O'Longan's translation of the Irish treatise on *Materia Medica* already spoken of. They illustrate the odd mixture of sound knowledge and superstition common in those times, not only among Irish physicians, but among those of all countries. Magic, charms, and astrological

\* Rev. Celt., ix. 224.

† This translation (in ms.) is in the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin.



observations, as aids in medical treatment, were universal among physicians in England down to the seventeenth century.

*Dysentery*.—Make  $3\frac{1}{2}$  lb. of iron red-hot, and plunge it into 3 quarts of new milk till it cools. Do this three times till the milk is boiled down to three pints. Half a pint taken in the morning and half a pint in the evening will cure.

*St. Antony's Fire or Erysipelas* (Irish, *Teine Dhia* and *Teine Buirr*).—Take sorrel (Irish *samhadh*: Latin names also given), "which doctors say is cold in the first degree and dry in the second degree"; break it up together with another substance (named but not identified), and apply it as a plaster. Another cure,—Boil the house-leek (Irish, *Iusra-an-teoiteain*: 'herb of burning'), and squeeze its juice on the diseased part. Another cure.—Rub the diseased part with the blood of a black cat.

*An ulcerated Wound*.—Break up sorrel, and mix it with apple-juice: put this on the wound.

*Swelling and Inflammation of the Eyes*.—Break up sorrel, and mix it with the white of an egg: apply this, and it will reduce the inflammation.

*Diarrhœa*: in Irish, 'Flux of the Belly'.—Boil sorrel with red wine, and drink in doses.

*A Sprain*.—Break the roots of marsh-mallows: mix with hog's lard; and apply as a plaster.

*A Woman's sore Breast*.—Boil [in certain proportions] hog's lard, flour, beeswax, and the white of a hen-egg in strong ale; and apply as a plaster.

*For Persons injured by Fairies*.—Take the following twenty-five herbs [which are all named]: while pulling them, certain prayers are to be said. Boil them in the water of a spring-well (not the water from a running stream). Be careful not to let a drop of the mixture fall, and not to put it on the ground, till the patient has drunk it all.

*A sore Eye*.—Take yarrow and the daisy plant, and bruise and squeeze the juice out of them: put into a little bottle with the milk of a woman who has given birth to a daughter, and a grain of white copperas, also the red blossom of the common eye-bright. Let the mixture stand till the next evening, and then wash the sore eye with it.

\* So called from the belief that it will preserve a house from fire if set growing on the roof.

5. *Popular Cures.*

**Vapour Bath and Sweating-House.**—We know that the Turkish bath is of recent introduction in these countries. But the hot-air and vapour bath was well known in Ireland, and was used as a cure for rheumatism down to a few years ago. I have not found it referred to in any ancient authorities ; though its use came down from old times ; and the masonry of the Inishmurray sweating-house, represented here, has all the appearance—as Mr. Wakeman remarks



FIG. 162.

Sweating-house on Inishmurray. Interior measurements :  $5\frac{1}{4}$  feet long, 4 feet wide, and about 5 feet high. (Drawn by Wakeman. From *Kilk. Arch. Journ.* for 1885-6, p. 212.)

—of being as old as any of the other primitive buildings in the island. The structures in which these baths were given are known by the name of *Tigh 'n alluis* [Teenollish], 'sweating-house' (*allus*, 'sweat'). They are still well known in the northern parts of Ireland ; and several have been described by Mr. Milligan, Mr. Wakeman, and the Rev. D. B. Mulcahy.\* They are small houses, entirely of stone, from five to seven feet long inside, with a low

\* See *Kilk. Archæol. Journ.*, 1885-6, p. 211 ; 1889, p. 268 ; 1890-91, pp. 165, 589.

little door through which one must creep : always placed remote from habitations : and near by is commonly a pool or tank of water. They were used in this way. A great fire of turf was kindled inside till the house became heated like an oven ; after which the embers were swept out : and vapour was produced by throwing water on the hot stones. Then the person, wrapping himself in a blanket, crept in and sat down on a bench of sods, after which the door was closed up. He remained there an hour or so till he was in a profuse perspiration ; and then creeping out, plunged right into the cold water, after emerging from which he was well rubbed till he became warm. After several baths at intervals of some days he usually got cured. Persons are still living who used these baths or saw them used.

The following curious memorandum by the late Prof. Henry Hennessy, F.R.S., is in the *Kilkenny Arch. Journal* for 1885-6 :—"What are called Turkish baths in Ireland and Great Britain have been designated Roman-Irish baths in Germany and Bohemia. I saw baths designated ' ' Römische-Irische bäder ' ' at Prague and Nuremberg in ' 1879." These, however, are of recent introduction into Germany in imitation of the hot-air and vapour baths in Dr. Barter's establishment at Blarney near Cork, which he opened in 1860, after the model of similar baths he had himself seen in the East.

**Fairy Bath.**—In Ireland they had fairy-baths, made with fairy-herbs, and these descended from old times. In the *Agallamh* it is related how two ladies, sisters, had been repudiated by their husbands for two other women. But Cailte gave them a bundle of *fairy-herbs* with directions how to use them. They washed in a bath in which these had been steeped, and sought out their husbands, whose love was revived by the virtue of the herbs ; and the two wives were restored to their homes.\*

\* *Silva Gadelica*. p. 126.

Within our own time medicated fairy-baths were in use. Sometimes children waste away by some internal disease, which in certain parts of the country is attributed to the fairies. The friends prepare a bath in which they steep the *lusmore*, or fairy-thimble (*digitalis purpurea*), an herb of potent virtue in fairy-cures; and in this they bathe the little sufferer in full expectation of a cure.

**Popular Herb-Knowledge.**—The peasantry were skilled in the curative qualities of herbs and in preparing and applying them to wounds and local diseases; and their skill has in a measure descended to the peasantry of the present day. There were “herb-doctors,” of whom the most intelligent, deriving their knowledge chiefly from Irish manuscripts, had considerable skill and did a good practice. But these were not recognised among the profession: they were amateurs without any technical qualification\*: and they were subject to the disabilities already mentioned (p. 603). From the peasantry of two centuries ago, Threlkeld and others who wrote on Irish botany, obtained a large part of the useful information they have given us in their books.† Popular cures were generally mixed up with much fairy superstition, which may perhaps be taken as indicating their great antiquity and pagan origin.

**Poison.**—How to poison with deadly herbs was known. The satirist Cridenbél died by swallowing something put into his food by the Dagda, whom the people then accused of killing him by giving him a deadly herb (*tre luib eccineol*).‡ After Cobthach Céol Breg had murdered his brother Loegaire Lorc, he had Loegaire’s son Ailill murdered also by paying a fellow to poison him.§

\* Census, 1842: Table of Deaths, p. xxxiii, note.

† *Ibid.*, pp. iii and iv.

‡ Second Battle of Moytura, Rev. Celt., xii. 65.

§ Zeitschr. für Celt. Phil., iii. 10 (from LL): see also Keating, 251.



**Healing-Stones.**—There were healing-stones preserved in various places ; one for instance in the little church of Relig near Bruckless in Donegal, which the people brought to their sick friends with much faith in its curative power.\* An amulet of this kind—a round stone of agate two inches in diameter—has been preserved from time immemorial in the family of Fitzgerald, formerly seneschals of Imokilly in Cork. It is sometimes called *cloch-onra*, the ‘amber-stone,’ and often the ‘murrain stone’ : for the water in which it has been steeped when given to cattle is believed to be a cure for murrain. The water is also



FIG. 163.

The Relig Healing-stone near Bruckless in Donegal : five inches long. (From Kilk. Archæol. Journ. for 1870-1, p. 469.)

often given for hydrophobia, both to human beings and to the lower animals.† A similar talisman—an oval crystal stone—is preserved by the family of M'Carthy of the Glen in Cork ; and it is still lent out to the neighbouring farmers for sick cattle.‡ In the church of St. Gobinet at Ballyvourney in Cork is a marvellous medicine stone ; and several other talismans of a similar kind are preserved by families in various parts of Ireland.§

Martin found medical stones very common in the western islands of Scotland in 1703|| : and they were used all over Scotland until very recently. The reader will here be reminded of the Lee-penny stone in “The Talisman,” the curative virtue of which was almost identical with that of the Imokilly stone. No doubt this

\* Kilk. Arch. Journ., 1870-1, 469.

† *Ibid.*, 1874-5, p. 440.

‡ *Ibid.*, 1864-6, p. 324.

§ For others see Wood-Martin, *Pagan Ireland*, 156 : and Kilk. Arch. Journ., 1889, p. 72. See also Windele's article on “Irish Medical Superstition” in Kilk. Archæol. Journ., 1864-6, p. 306.

|| Martin, pp. 134, 226, &c.

custom was originally brought to Scotland from Ireland, like most other early Scottish popular customs.

The use of medical stones probably descended from pagan times : but, like many another pagan custom, it was adopted by some of the early saints. In Adamnan's "Life of St. Columba" (II. xxxiii.), we read that on one occasion Columba took up a white stone from the river Ness, and having blessed it, he said to his companions :—"Mark this white stone, by which the Lord will work many cures of the sick among the heathen people." And the narrative goes on to say that many persons got cured of deadly ailments by drinking the water in which it had been steeped. Holy wells credited with miraculous curative virtues have already been noticed; an additional one is figured on next page.



FIG. 164.



FIG 165.

Two views, front and side, of the Garnavilla amulet; half size. A crystal ball set in a bronze frame. For disease in cattle: hung round the neck of the animal while feeding. (From Wood-Martin's *Traces of the Elder Faiths*, II. 75. and that from Kilik. *Archæol. Journal*. Garnavilla is near Caher in Tipperary.)

**Prayers, Incantations, and Charms.**—Prayers to individual saints for special diseases, and many incantations and charms used for similar purposes, some in Irish, some in Latin, are met with in Irish manuscripts of the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries : the Latin often in verse, the Irish commonly in a sort of rhythmic prose. Aed mac Bric (Aed or Hugh the son of Brec), bishop, was the tutelary saint of the Kinelea, a tribe who occupied what is now known as the barony of Moycashel in Westmeath. He was descended from Niall of the Nine Hostages, and died in the year 589. From him is named the present parish of Rahugh (Hugh's or Aed's rath) near Tullamore; for the chief of the tribe presented him with his rath or fort

within which Aed built a church: and the old fort and the ruins of Bishop Aed's church are to be seen to this day. A legend in his Life relates that once a man who was afflicted with a violent headache came to him for relief: and the saint, not being able to cure him in any other way, took the headache himself and sent the man away relieved. Hence it came to pass, as the legend goes on to say, that persons were in the habit of invoking this saint's name for a headache. St. Aed mac Bric is still invoked for a headache by the people of Westmeath. Near



FIG. 166.

Toberaraght, the well of the virgin St. Athracit or Attracta, near the shore of Lough Talt, in the townland of Glennawoo, seven miles west of Tobercurry, in Sligo. Reported to cure epilepsy and other nervous diseases. (From Colonel Wood-Martin's *Pagan Ireland*, p. 155.)

the ruins of the old monastery of Rahugh is his holy well; and in the same place is a large stone, still called Bishop Hugh's stone—for, according to local tradition, the saint was accustomed to pray on it—to which the people of the surrounding districts have been, time out of mind, in the habit of resorting for the relief of headache. A century and a half ago an accidental discovery linked this modern practice with remote antiquity. In the middle of the eighteenth century a continental scholar, Mone, archive director of Carlsruhe, published a short Latin poem which

he found in a manuscript preserved in the monastery of Reichenau on an island in Lake Constance. It is a prayer written by an Irishman in the eighth century—copied in all probability from an older book—invoking “Aidus Sanctus mech Brich” for relief from a headache. This venerable and highly interesting document, as well as the legend of the saint’s life, shows that the practice of invoking St. Aed for a headache has continued from the time of his death to this day, a period of thirteen centuries.\*

In an eighth-century manuscript in the monastery of St. Gall in Switzerland are several prayers, charms, and incantations for various diseases, some in Irish, some in Latin, which have been printed by Zeuss (p. 949). One (in Irish) is for *galar fuail*, ‘disease of the urine’; another for long life; and another (in Latin) for headache. This last is not addressed to any particular saint. It invokes “the eye of Isaia, the tongue of Solomon, the mind of Benjamin, the heart of Paul, the faith of Abraham,” &c., ending with “Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth”; to which this direction in Irish is

\* The following is a copy of this obscurely-worded old invocation :—

O rex, o rector regminis,  
o cultor cœli carminis  
o persecutor murmoris  
o deus alti agminis.

*i.e.* filio *i.e.* pater

*Aido* sanctus *mech Brich* benibula  
posco puro precamina,  
ut refrigerat flumina  
mei capitis calida.

Curat caput cum renibus

*i.e.* cerebre

meis, atque talibus,

cum oculis et genibus,  
cum auribus et naribus.

*i.e.* nervibus

Cum inclitis euntibus,  
cum fistulis sonantibus  
cum lingua atque dentibus,  
cum lachrymarum fontibus.

Sanctus Aid altus adjuvat,  
meum caput ut liberat,  
ut hoc totum perseverat  
sanum atque vigilat.

For further information about Aed mac Bric, see Dr. Reeves, “On the Hymnus Sancti Aidi,” Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad., VII. 91: the Rev. Prof. George Stokes, “On St. Hugh and his Church,” Journ. Roy. Soc. Antiqq. Ireland, 1896, 325: and Joyce, Irish Names of Places, II. 86.



added :—" This is sung every day about thy head against  
 " headache. After singing it thou putttest thy spittle into  
 " thy palm and thou putttest it round thy two temples and  
 " on the back of thy head, and thereat thou singest thy  
 " Pater Noster thrice, and thou putttest a cross of thy  
 " spittle on the crown of thy head, and then thou makest  
 " this sign [the letter] **U** on thy head."

In some of these incantations there are invocations to the pagan Irish leech-god Diancecht (who is stated to have bequeathed one particular salve) and to his brother the smith-god Goibniu.\*

Incantations and charms for diseases are also used in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, where indeed the custom is now more general than it is in the mother country. Many of these will be found—all in Scotch Gaelic and translated—in Carmichael's "*Carmina Gadelica*," vol. ii., pp. 2 to 21, and p. 124. One of them is *ar galar fuail*, 'against disease of the urine' or gravel: which, although different in words from that printed by Zeuss from a manuscript written twelve centuries ago, is identical with it in tone and spirit.



FIG. 167.—Ornament composed from the Book of Kells.

\* In Stokes and Strachan's *Thesaurus Palæohibernicus*, vol. ii., pp. 248, 249, 250, will be found originals and translations of all the above mentioned Irish Spells and Incantations, and many others.





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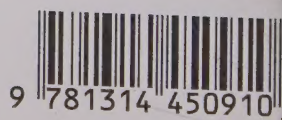






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